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General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

10th meeting
Friday, 9 June 2000, at 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mrs. Ismail (Nigeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-23/6/Add.3)

The President: I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-23/6/Add.3. In the letter contained in that document, the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that since the issuance of his communications contained in documents A/S-23/6 and Addenda 1 and 2, Bosnia and Herzegovina has made the necessary payments to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in that document?

It was so decided.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The Acting President: I first give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Indira Thacoor-Sidaya, Minister of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development of Mauritius.

Mrs. Thacoor-Sidaya (Mauritius): On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Mauritius, I wish to thank the United Nations for this special session of the General Assembly, which symbolizes the march that we women started in Beijing in 1995. Five years later, our march continues as we are gathered here to measure our progress, to learn from our mistakes as well as our successes and to chalk out our common future.

My country signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and in 1995 at Beijing undertook strong commitments to which it has remained faithful. Thus gender equality has been integrated into our national legislation through the introduction of a Protection of Human Rights Act; amendments to the Civil Code to ensure strict equality between spouses in the administration of property and parental rights; amendments to the Criminal Code to make penalties against sexual abuse and family abandonment more severe and to establish sexual harassment as an offence; amendment of the Citizenship Act to give to the foreign spouse of a Mauritian woman the right to citizenship; and the introduction of a Protection from Domestic Violence Act.

Institutional mechanisms have been strengthened for more effective service delivery and support to

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women. Mauritius has a full-fledged ministry for women headed by a cabinet minister. A National Women's Council functions as a coordinating body for women's associations. A Gender Bureau has been established to ensure the implementation of a gender management system based on the Commonwealth Secretariat's guidelines. A consultative mechanism, known as the National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, comprised of non-governmental organizations, ministries, the United Nations Development Programme, the private sector and other stakeholders, provides critical inputs on gender policy.

A national women entrepreneur council has been established by an act of Parliament to promote women entrepreneurship. Economic empowerment has been one of our main thrusts for action, as we believe that without the means of livelihood no woman can enjoy her rights fully. In 1998, within its poverty alleviation programme, the Government of Mauritius introduced a microcredit scheme based on the Grameen model of Bangladesh to provide loans to women without collateral for income-generating activities. Marketing being a serious impediment for women, a market centre provides a free marketing outlet, while a common facility centre offers training for skills development.

In order to support working mothers, an early childhood development policy is being implemented for the training of childcare givers and the establishment of childcare facilities in deprived areas.

Violence against women and children is an unacceptable form of human exploitation. In 1997, the Government of Mauritius introduced the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, which has enabled thousands of silent women to break their silence and to benefit from legal protection. Structures for the provision of 24-hour service, free legal assistance and psychological counselling have been set up. One study has been conducted on the factors leading to domestic violence and another one on the criminological aspects of violence at home.

Mauritius offers equality of opportunity and access to education, health, social services and employment, and there is no disparity in the enrolment rates of girls and boys. However, problems such as sexual exploitation have retained our attention, as they mostly affect the girl child. A study of the commercial sexual exploitation of children was conducted in 1997, followed by information, education and communication campaigns in high-risk areas. Child-watch network groups have been set up with the help of social workers and community-based associations for surveillance and early intervention.

Women's access to information and technology has been improved, with new centres for women and families set up in under-served regions and the opening of an information technology centre exclusively for women.

As far as political participation is concerned, despite some improvements since 1995, women's participation is still relatively low, with women comprising 7 per cent of the Parliament, 8.5 per cent at the municipal level and 2.8 per cent at the village level. Women make up less than 20 per cent of the senior managerial level in the public sector.

Leadership training programmes are being conducted to encourage self-assertiveness and confidence-building among women. The National Gender Action Plan has also proposed that 30 per cent of seats be reserved for women. Preparing the National Gender Action Plan has been a gratifying experience. The Plan outlines our vision for the attainment of gender equality by the year 2005. It was formulated after wide consultations with all stakeholders, including women at the grass-roots level, and addresses health, human rights, human resources development and gender equality. As an immediate consequence, an engendering of the budget initiative has started, coupled with training and research programmes.

Advancing the cause of gender equality is not without its difficulties. In addition to inadequate resources, the problems of shortage of specialized skills in gender planning and analysis, the lack of research and data on gender and the low priority accorded to gender equality objectives hinder our actions significantly.

This special session of the General Assembly is a unique opportunity to reverse negative attitudes and to think of a new world order based on partnerships and participation within the country and beyond the national frontiers. We women have to develop a new sense of leadership and responsibility and to create a true culture of peace. We should not forget that we hold the keys to our own future. Therefore, we should not lose this special opportunity to shape a better vision for the future of women and for humanity.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Nana Aicha Foumakoye, Minister for Social Development, Advancement of Women and Child Protection of Niger.

Mrs. Foumakoye (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like, through you Madam Vice-President, to extend to all the members of the Bureau my warm congratulations on the excellent way the work of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women is being carried out. I would also like to extend my congratulations to you for your personal commitment to the defence of the cause of women.

I would also like to extend the cordial greetings of His Excellency Mr. Tandja Mamadou, President of the Republic of Niger, to all the participants in these deliberations, and to convey to them our wishes for success in the pursuit of the objectives that have brought us together here today.

Like other members of the international community, Niger has resolutely committed itself to implementing the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. Five years after the holding of the Beijing Conference, we must take note of the fact that the progress achieved by my country has not been linear in nature and that it has varied in relation to time and area of concern.

With regard to institutional terms, in 1996 Niger adopted a national policy for the promotion of women, which sets out the Government's major guidelines for the promotion of women. It is in this framework that a national monitoring office for the advancement of women was established. Once it becomes operational, that office will be a clearinghouse for appropriate dialogue for all actors in the area of the advancement of women. Furthermore, a national committee was established and given responsibility for following up the implementation of the Beijing recommendations.

Niger's policy for the advancement of women, like the policies of other countries represented here, is not the result of Government action alone. This issue gives rise to great enthusiasm among all partners, State and private alike, and Niger has seen the emergence of a number of civil-society associations and non-governmental organizations, which work together vigorously to promote the rights of women and children.

In the legal sphere, the constitution of the Fifth Republic guarantees equality before the law for all, irrespective of sex or of social, racial, ethnic or religious origin. Yet the women of Niger continue to face persistent social impediments arising mainly from tradition and from an erroneous interpretation of certain precepts of Islam, my country's principal religion.

A striking indication of the political courage shown by the leaders of the Fifth Republic is the adoption of a number of texts intended to improve the status of women. Some of these aim to bring national legislation into conformity with international conventions and treaties that my country has ratified, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to cite but one example.

Although it is difficult for the women of Niger to enjoy certain rights, because the circumstances that would make this possible do not exist, those women consider that they have reached a major milestone with Niger's accession to the Convention. That milestone also marks another important improvement: an evolution in thinking. Indeed, the discussions leading up to Niger's accession to the Convention were an occasion for the pluralistic and democratic expression of opinions. Subjects once taboo were openly and freely discussed. We can now proceed to considering them in greater depth and to making progress on them.

This year, 2000, we shall review all the legal texts relating to women with a view to bringing them into conformity with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The fact that civil society, development partners and the State are all part of this process is in itself a significant advance that we must continue, consolidate and enhance.

I turn now to the economic side of the issues before us. Here, my country has an economic recovery programme one of whose priorities is the war on poverty. Studies show that 63 percent of the Niger population is poor, and 34 per cent very poor; women account for 73 per cent of this group. Sixty per cent of the plan's budget is targeted for programmes and projects for women. The women of Niger appreciate this and have welcomed it, especially because increasing the income of women is an integral part of the national framework programme for the war on

poverty, which has enabled recipients to improve their standard of living at the community level, and to own property, especially land.

Turning to social issues, the gross educational enrolment rate remains low, at 32.23 per cent, a figure that is even lower for girls: 25.36 per cent. Because of this imbalance, a unit for the enrolment of girls was set up in 1996; its work helped to increase the enrolment rate for girls from 36 per cent in 1996 to higher than 39 per cent in 1998-1999. Schools are encouraged to aim for at least 50 per cent enrolment of girls by the end of 2000. There are indications that this goal could be broadly attained within the time-frame.

Eighty per cent of the population — 91 per cent of women — are illiterate. To address this, my country began in 1988 to promote functional literacy for women, through linking literacy to the involvement of women in income-producing activities. The Beijing commitments in this sphere have helped bolster this approach. Literacy remains an essential element of all programmes for women. The tangible results in this area gained Niger a 1999 United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) literacy prize.

To the under-enrolment of young girls and the illiteracy of women we must add the various forms of violence of which they are victims. Indeed, the rise in new forms of violence, including sexual violence, against women, and especially against girl children, is a source of real concern. Hence, with encouragement from the Government, a great national movement quickly arose to eliminate all forms of violence against the physical and psychological integrity of women. Through their campaigns to increase awareness about violence against women and the girl child, religious organizations have made a valuable contribution to combating this phenomenon.

Along with those organizations, the media too have made a contribution through the formulation and implementation by the Network of Communication Technicians of a communication plan. The Network has done a fine job of spreading knowledge about the Convention o the Rights of the Child and about the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and it is a powerful lever for necessary social mobilization on the priorities that have been established. Similarly, the contribution of the National Association of Traditional Chiefs, which is involved in promoting the schooling of the girl child and in combating violence against girls, is a source of hope, especially because, with their moral authority, traditional chiefs can help efface social ills.

In the health field there has been progress in the area of reproductive health: the rate of contraceptive use rose from 4.4 per cent in 1992 to 8.2 per cent in 1998. This admittedly modest achievement was gained with the involvement of Islamic organizations, through information and awareness campaigns among the population — of which, I would recall, 90 per cent is Muslim.

I wish now to speak of the low participation of women in decision-making bodies and in public life in general. My country experienced instability between 1995 and 1999, when women's participation in the Government and in the National Assembly fell sharply. Women are under-represented in decision-making areas of State administration. On the other hand, many women are extremely active in our political parties and in civil society. I must acknowledge that we are far from meeting the expectations born of our country's democratization with respect to women's membership of high decision-making bodies. In fact, soon after this process began, women's participation in the National Assembly and in the Government improved slightly, but it later decreased.

During the Second Republic, there were five women deputies and one minister. From 1991 to 1993 there were two women in the Government and three in the High Council of the Republic, the parliament of transition. The First Government of the Third Republic included five female ministers, while the National Assembly had two women. Three women were in the Government, the so-called Transition Government, installed after the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1995. From January 1995 to January 1996, two women were appointed ministers in the Government of Cohabitation, and three women were elected to the National Assembly.

The First Government of the Fourth Republic had four female ministers, one of whom was Minister of State. The Second Government of the Fourth Republic also included four female ministers, one of whom was Minister of State, and the Third Republic had three, one of whom was Minister of State. During that same period, only one woman was elected to the National Assembly. The Fifth Republic does not augur well,

with two women in the Government and only one in the National Assembly.

However, women are making some improvements in other spheres, such as diplomacy, higher education and central and territorial administration. As regards the specific case of technical instructions, a letter circulated by the 1999 Transition Government instructed Ministers that women should be favoured in promotion to higher posts if their diplomas and competencies were equal. Furthermore, it was noted that there was an increase in female candidates in the latest legislative elections — that is, 63, 29 of whom were incumbents, compared to fewer than 40 before. Here it is appropriate to hail the contribution made by the committee of the network of female African ministers and parliamentarians, which has led an awareness campaign for women, urging them not only to exercise their right to vote but also to run for office.

Recently a law was adopted instituting a quota system to benefit women. According to the terms of this law, at least 25 per cent of the candidates on each list for different elective posts should be women, and 10 per cent of the posts ought to go to women. Also, 25 per cent of posts in the Government and in the central and territorial administrations and other high-level, non-elected posts should be filled by women.

Much remains to be done, but what has been attained should be encouraged, and strategies under way require the entire support of the international community in order to overcome all the challenges we face at the beginning of this twenty-first century marked by globalization.

Speaking of challenges, I would like to underscore the fact that my country remains persuaded that sustained attention should be focused on the responsibility and mobilization of all, through dynamic world partnership with a view to universal access to basic social services and equality between the sexes, to make this a living reality.

But how can we attain such objectives if we continue to witness, without reacting, the drastic reduction of official development assistance, which constitutes the principal source of external financial support for the poorest countries? How can we attain these objectives if the heavily indebted poor countries, such as my own, do not benefit from more flexible conditions alleviating the debt that strains their already too meagre resources?

These are some of the ideas that I wanted to present to the Assembly.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Ms. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, State Minister for the Empowerment of Women of Indonesia.

Ms. Parawansa (Indonesia): It is a great honour and privilege for me to join you here today in this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

As a developing country contending with formidable social, economic and political challenges, Indonesia has not found it an easy task to translate the global concepts of women's rights and gender equality into practical country-level strategies; nor has it been easy to replicate the best practices from all over the world in promoting the welfare of women. Nevertheless, we have been greatly inspired by the strong commitment of the international community to fulfil the Beijing Platform for Action and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, as well as by the current efforts to mainstream the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

In 1999, Indonesia's People's Assembly adopted its new broad State policy guidelines that, inter alia, identify gender equality and gender justice as one of our national development objectives. Moreover, Indonesia's newly reconstituted State Ministry for Women's Empowerment has conducted an internal reorganization and policy review, which has resulted in far-reaching changes on how the Ministry defines and carries out its mission. We are now drafting presidential instructions in order to affirm the joint roles and responsibilities for gender mainstreaming.

In order to obtain nationwide support in our quest for gender mainstreaming, bureaux of women's empowerment have been established in 14 out of 27 provincial government offices. There are 89 centres for women's studies located all over the country. Moreover, there are numerous institutions to end violence against women and promote women's human rights, such as the National Commission on Human Rights, the National Commission on the Protection of Children and the National Commission on Violence against Women.

In November 1999, Indonesia strengthened its commitment to the objective of eliminating violence against women as a key barrier to gender equality. At that time, the State Minister for Women's

Empowerment officially announced a joint State and Community Proclamation to Eliminate Violence Against Women. A Government and civil society partnership has developed a national action plan based on a "zero tolerance" policy.

In February of this year, Indonesia signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Government is now also reviewing from a gender perspective all of Indonesia's laws and regulations to identify those that discriminate against women. A large array of Indonesian women's non-governmental organizations, women's rights groups and human rights organizations have played an important role as partners and supporters for the harmonization of amendments of laws, policies and programmes with a view to bringing them into line with the Women's Convention, the Beijing Platform and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.

The financial crisis has had a profound impact on the quality of life of all Indonesians, and on women in particular. A national survey in 1998 showed that the problem was compounded by the fact that 12.95 per cent of Indonesian families are headed by women, a majority of whom are divorced or widowed and work outside the home. Studies reveal that a disproportionately high number of families among the poor are headed by women and that childcare in such families is inadequate, thereby adversely affecting the growth and development of children, especially girls. The economic crisis has also increased maternal mortality rates and the incidence of poverty among women, as well as drug abuse. Indonesia is carrying out various programmes in response to these challenges.

One of those programmes is the strengthening and revitalization of community service centres, called POSYANDU. There are over 200,000 POSYANDU spread out in urban and rural areas. POSYANDU basically provide integrated services for health, nutrition, family planning and activities aimed at generating income for women as part of the poverty alleviation strategy. As I am also the Chairperson of the National Family Planning Coordinating Board, I intend to launch a social education campaign to further reduce maternal and infant mortality and to help prevent the spread of sexual transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, through promoting a more active role of husbands in reproductive health.

Marriage at an early age is still common in many parts of the country and exposes the girl child to health risks. It also stands in the way of her attaining the education that will provide the knowledge and skills necessary to empower her and enable her to improve her life. It is therefore essential that social and cultural barriers to the proper education of women and girls, including the widespread practice of early-age marriage, be eliminated.

The Government is also endeavouring to uphold the human rights of women in the workplace. Having ratified all of the core conventions of the International Labour Organization, including Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, Indonesia is embarking on a programme to reform the labour laws. Furthermore, Indonesia is committed to reversing the negative effects of the crisis on women and to removing entrenched barriers preventing their full participation in political life and economic development. We are also taking immediate and vigorous action to stop ruthless practices, such as trafficking in women and children, child prostitution and pornography.

We are pleased to note that prominent women's and human rights non-governmental organizations at the national and international levels have extended their support and assistance to Indonesian women migrant workers. We hope that more countries and non-governmental organizations can join together to give women migrant workers a safe and dignified life and working environment.

In our common noble endeavour to improve and promote the rights of women and children, we in Indonesia have a long way to go and, undoubtedly, international support and cooperation are needed. Nevertheless, Indonesia remains committed to helping women and children realize their full human rights and an enhanced quality of life. To realize gender equality, equity and justice, we pledge our readiness to work together with all members of the international community in enhancing the status of women everywhere for the well-being of all of humankind.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Shirley Gbujama, Minister for Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs of Sierra Leone.

Mrs. Gbujama (Sierra Leone): I bring greetings from the Government and people of Sierra Leone,

especially the women working at the grass-roots level and those men who are working in partnership with us to achieve equal status and opportunities for both men and women.

My delegation welcomes the opportunity to assess what we have done in Sierra Leone in the past five years to empower women to be more effective in a strong coalition as equal partners with men as we enter the twenty-first century. The advancement of women in Sierra Leone or anywhere else in the world cannot be achieved outside this partnership, treated in isolation as a women's issue. We cannot achieve our goals on our own, without partnership being strengthened in social, political, economic, environmental and cultural matters.

It is against this background of working in partnership between government and civil society, between women and men, between the richest and poorest States, between the able and the not so able and between the international community and our individual nations that the Beijing Platform for Action must be reviewed and appraised.

As we consider the subject of this special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", we must be clear in our minds that when we speak of equality, we mean equal opportunities, equal rights, equal status, equal approaches to our common problems. It is not a question of physical strength or even bravery, because women, too, have these attributes, in addition to their special qualities of beauty, delicacy, determination and special perception.

The United Nations heard the cries of women in the early 1970s, responding with much positive action before Beijing. But it was the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 that set out a full and complete agenda in the critical areas of concern which must be overcome in this century, and not the next. This is why we trust that, with the aim of achieving a happier world, the final document of this Conference, with its recommendations to the Millennium Summit, will take us way beyond Beijing+5 without taking anything away from what we achieved in Beijing.

Sierra Leone adopted the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, but there were a few institutional structures to address the situation, and such structures were generally disjointed. Therefore, in 1996, with the first democratically elected Government in two decades, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was established, not only to advocate and ensure a more equitable distribution and rational use of public, financial and organizational resources, particularly for women and children, but to coordinate and develop strategies for cementing the interrelationship between government and private institutions and international agencies which address the issues covered under the 12 areas of concern.

Other institutional structures that were established include a women's research unit and a gender and research and documentation centre at the University of Sierra Leone. Women themselves took the initiative to set up non-governmental structures to facilitate the Beijing Platform for Action, including such organizations as the Campaign for Good Governance, the Women's Forum, the Sierra Leone chapter of the Forum for African Women's Education, the Sierra Leone Association of University Women, the Alliance of Female Journalists, Sisters Unite and, recently, the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians, to name a few.

In the area of power and decision-making, the Government of Sierra Leone appointed women to the important Ministries of Gender and Children's Affairs, Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Housing and Country Planning and, recently, the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning. Women have been made heads of important commissions, such as the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, and have been appointed as chairpersons of strategic parastatals, such as those dealing with mining and general services. The number of women has also increased in junior ministerial positions, and even though men continue to dominate parliamentary representation, at 92.2 per cent, women's representation, at 7.8 per cent, marks an improvement when compared with the situation before Beijing.

Regrettably, with regard to women and armed conflict, in the course of the brutal rebel war that has prevailed in Sierra Leone, women, especially young girls, have been abducted, raped and used as sex slaves. This notwithstanding, women remain undaunted. They have encouraged and participated in the settlement of disputes through negotiation, mediation, dialogue, arbitration and reconciliation. One of the most remarkable contributions that women have made to the consolidation of peace in our country since the 1998 Lomé Peace Agreement was their massive turnout

several weeks ago to protest the illegal detention of some 500 United Nations peacekeepers by rebels of the Revolutionary United Front. Two days later, the women came out again and joined in a mass national demonstration for peace. The result was that 21 people were shot dead, including women, and many wounded by rebels. This was a turning point in the current search for peace.

In the area of poverty, we have intensified implementation of our poverty alleviation programmes and embarked on strategic action with a strong policy focus aimed at war victims. A programme of social action for poverty alleviation geared towards gender mainstreaming is headed by a young woman.

The health problems of women and girls are being addressed, too, with special attention on maternal mortality, unsafe abortion, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. In all of this, the international community, through the United Nations system, especially the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund, has been solidly behind us.

The education of women and the girl child has been given prominence. One noteworthy achievement is that the educational system has been restructured, among other things, to give prominence to the education of the girl child, especially in the previously male-dominated area of science. In the area of training, many technical and vocational institutions have been established to address the training needs of all young people, girls included. With improved advocacy, these technical and vocational institutions, especially those for girls, have filled what used to be a very big vacuum in the educational system.

For the girl child in Sierra Leone, traditional practices within various cultures continue to pose serious challenges to her advancement. A new and significant problem, however, has been the increase of girl mothers resulting from the rape and abduction of children by rebels. Many of the girl children released following the Lomé Peace Agreement were either pregnant or with babies. A new educational policy published in 1995 helps the situation by emphasizing affirmative action in favour of basic education programmes for girls.

More than 70 per cent of our women are illiterate. Women have continued until recently to fare very badly in the area of educational opportunities and privileges. The focus on education for the girl child as one of the priority areas is therefore understood and justified.

With respect to the economy, concrete steps have been taken to establish and strengthen local mechanisms for the advancement of women in the area of business with access to microcredit schemes, financial institutions and skills development, resulting in a steady increase in small business enterprises owned by women. A special women's unit within the Ministry of Agriculture, for example, ensures that women have access to agricultural services, linkages with donors and other development partners to build women's capacity for agriculture-related activities.

In the media, much awareness has been created of women's rights, participation and training in relation to the media. Since Beijing, two media associations have been founded: the Sierra Leone Association of Women in the Media and the Alliance of Female Journalists.

With a view to minimizing violence against women and in a bid to express concern, we have concentrated on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and condemned the level of abduction, rape, violence, amputation, maiming and other atrocities suffered by women and girls in particular. Women's non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Social Welfare, assisted by the United Nations system, are now working together to have a centre to which women subjected to violence can go, especially for free legal services. In the meantime, government and its partners continue to provide counselling services and medical and health education to battered and sexually abused women and girls.

Concerning women and human rights, the sensitization of the public on the rights of women continues in various media, including radio and television programmes and a nationwide consultation held in 1998, facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme and carried out jointly by my Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Local Government, insofar as customary laws are involved. We have also had a team of women legal practitioners who are currently examining our laws with a view to identifying and seeking revision of any discriminatory provisions.

In spite of all the difficulties and problems that have abounded throughout the five-year period since Beijing, due to a senseless rebel war, it is evident that

whatever we have achieved has been done through sustained action only during the very brief peaceful periods, amounting to no more than two and a half years, which is only half of the period under review.

The success of whatever policies Governments make for the empowerment of women will depend largely not only on the institutions, organizations and networks which we ourselves as women establish and maintain to keep the pressure on, but also on our own sincerity as women in these matters. There are many of us who shy away from what we must do and leave men to do it. We cannot afford to do that. The private sector of society must have a commitment, too — women should have a commitment — if there is to be any progress.

Whatever we have achieved in my country, Sierra Leone, a lot of credit goes to United Nations agencies, friendly Governments and our partners in the international arena. Without their support, development and peace would have eluded us completely. I thank God that the United Nations hostages have been released, but we should not forget that there are still thousands of Sierra Leoneans who are refugees or displaced people — women and children, mostly, among them — some of whom are still held against their will by the rebels, with continued atrocities and violations of women. They must be released, too, and assisted to resume their normal lives.

I take this opportunity to appeal to the international community through this special session to help us maintain commitment to action on the Beijing Platform for Action, first, by devising some action plan against all those in the international community who have contributed directly or indirectly to the prolongation of the conflict in Sierra Leone; secondly, by taking action against the illegal sale of Sierra Leone diamonds, which have fuelled the conflict and have brought so much pain and suffering to our people, particularly women, whom we are here to honour today; thirdly, by helping us strengthen the government machinery for more effective coordination of women's matters; and fourthly, by further assisting the poorest of the poor nations with adequate funding for much-needed social amenities to war widows and those many women who are heads of their homes and family.

The Acting President: I call on Mrs. Rachel Dea, Minister for Social Affairs, Advancement of the Family and Disabled Persons of the Central African Republic.

Mrs. Dea (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): We are meeting here today, five years after Beijing, to assess together, mid-way, the efforts made towards implementing the commitments undertaken to improve the status of women. This assessment, which is a real tribute to the United Nations, was necessary to appreciate the position women hold in each of our States.

However, Madam President, before doing that, on behalf of the delegation of the Central African Republic, I wish to extend to you and to the members of the Bureau warm congratulations on your election. The special qualities of the President will ensure the success of our work, and he can be assured that he has my delegation's full cooperation to that end.

I also bring wishes for the success of the special session expressed by the President and head of State of the Central African Republic, His Excellency Ange-Félix Patassé, and Madame Angele Patassé whose faith in the ideals of the United Nations remains unshakeable.

It is a pleasure for me to renew to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, who recently granted us the honour of visiting us in the Central African Republic, our country's great appreciation for what he is doing for peace and development in the world and particularly my country, through the presence in the Central African Republic of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA), now represented by the Bureau of the United Nations in the Central African Republic, BONUCA.

The Government of the Central African Republic participated actively in the Beijing Conference and subscribed to the resolutions and recommendations adopted during that important meeting. Like other States of the world, the Central African Republic committed itself to adopting the concrete measures necessary to put them into action. Before giving a comprehensive survey of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Central African Republic, I first wish to carry out a noble duty and express, on behalf of my Government, my profound thanks and sincere gratitude to the international community, which reacted so quickly to halt the vortex of civil war, which began in my country in 1966.

The Beijing Platform for Action was implemented in the Central African Republic within a particularly difficult social, political and economic context, marked by three rebellions by part of the army during 1996 and 1997, difficulties associated with signature of the agreement with the Bretton Woods institutions and the general spread of poverty throughout the population, especially women.

After the Beijing Conference, the Government first began to strengthen institutional machinery for promoting the status of women. This was translated into decentralization of the Ministry in charge of women's matters in regional offices, strengthening the technical capacity and decentralization of the National Body for Dialogue for the Promotion of Women, the consultative body for coordinating all actions for women in the national territory.

The strengthening of these institutional machineries should be continued in the short term by structuring and reconverting the National Body for Dialogue to a national council for coordination and dialogue for the promotion of women to link it with the Cabinet. This council will involve the highest officials of the State: the President of the Republic and the Cabinet. It will also involve the representatives of all the ministerial high-level departments, non-governmental organization representatives and the programme directors of United Nations agencies.

It is intended to strengthen the technical capacities of non-governmental organizations in their areas of intervention in order to maximize opportunities for success in the implementation of the national policy on the promotion of the status of women. Indeed, since the Beijing summit, and under the impetus of the National Body for Dialogue, there has been growing awareness among Central African women regarding their status, primarily through the improvement of their living conditions and their considerable input into the struggle against poverty in their country. This awareness has been translated into the establishment of more than 200 non-governmental organizations and women's associations which intervene in all areas of social life.

These non-governmental organizations are today very active, but, unfortunately, they are confronted with the enormous difficulty of financing their activities, a problem to which the Government cannot respond effectively in view of the cash-flow problems that it has experienced over the past few years. For that reason, I would like to use this rostrum to ask my country's development partners, and more particularly women's non-governmental organizations of the developed countries, to lend a strong hand to their sisters in Central Africa, so that they can fully assume their roles not only in Central Africa but throughout the world, as women are the actors and the promoters of sustainable human development.

Once this prerequisite was put into effect, the Government redefined the national policy on the promotion of women on the basis of the Beijing Platform for Action, integrating new national realities. Twelve new priorities were thus retained.

In terms of the protection of women and their participation in decision-making, I should point to the acceleration and adoption of the family code, the law which was promulgated in 1998.

Access by Central African women to decision-making posts is still far from the 30 per cent proportion recommended by the United Nations. However, a clear advance of women in the national political sphere is noticeable and can be seen in the number of women deputies in the National Assembly, which increased from 3 out of 85 for the period 1993 to 1998 to 8 out of 109 for the period of 1999 to 2004. This increase is due to the large numbers of women joining political parties following intensive consciousness-raising. There are also three women in the Government.

The question of peace deserves particular attention. I would also ask those present to take measures towards securing the firm commitment of the international community to act on the deep-rooted causes of conflicts, because there can be no development without peace. In this regard, I would like to point out that the involvement of women has been noticeable in the settlement of conflicts which resulted from rebellions, through their associative structures.

In the health field, many studies explain the reasons which make women vulnerable: the arduousness of their tasks, lack of control over their sexuality and over reproduction, a sterility rate which has risen to 26 per cent, malnutrition, insufficient basic health services, and traditional practices which are deleterious to their health — all crowned by the insufficient access by women to health services because they lack the means to pay the costs.

This concern has led us to include health, not only as the Government's first priority, but also as the second priority of our national policy on the promotion of the status of women.

Accordingly, particular attention has been devoted to maternal and child health; family planning; the combat against practices that are harmful to women and girls, and against violence directed at them; and the reproductive and sexual health of women and girls.

In terms of violence, the women of the Central African Republic are the victims on a daily basis of traditional practices that are harmful to their health. This violence takes several forms: female genital mutilation; early marriage and pregnancy; poor treatment in the family or domestic violence; persecution of widows; assault and battery; rape; and sexual harassment. These acts, which are socio-culturally sanctioned, are committed openly and freely, in blatant contravention of laws against them, and have even become socially acceptable.

To tackle this situation, the Government established in 1996 a national committee to combat traditional practices that are harmful to the health of women and girls, and the violence against them. That committee is carrying out awareness-raising campaigns in areas where these acts are most prevalent. However, I should note that the Committee is limited in its activities by a significant lack of resources.

Poverty, which is on the rise in the Central African Republic, affects many more women than men. For that reason, the national plan that is being elaborated to combat this scourge is placing particular emphasis on women.

The economic underperformance of women will be addressed through the promotion of training activities and the establishment of a microfinance system to support women's initiatives, because women contribute significantly to the gross national product.

The Acting President: The representative of the Central African Republic may wish to conclude, as her time is up.

Mrs. Dea (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): The educational system in the Central African Republic is not adapted to national realities. Teaching materials contain discriminatory stereotypes, and infrastructures and equipment are lacking.

That is why I make an urgent appeal, from this lofty rostrum, to this special session of the United Nations for concrete and exceptional measures to be taken to help support the efforts of the Central African Republic to implement fully the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Acting President: I appeal once again to representatives to be good enough to keep silent in the General Assembly Hall in order to maintain the dignity of the Assembly and out of courtesy to our speakers. I also ask speakers to keep to their time limit of seven minutes.

I now call on Mrs. Luisa María Cuculiza, Minister for the Advancement of Women and Human Development of Peru.

Mrs. Cuculiza (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Peruvian Government and on my own behalf, I wish to extend a sisterly welcome to all of the women of the world who are present here at this special session of the General Assembly.

In spite of our physical, cultural and linguistic differences, we as women face the same problems. We must therefore maintain a spirit of solidarity among ourselves and with those who need our support.

I also extend my congratulations to the President, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, and to the members of the Bureau for the important work that they have accomplished.

The Peruvian Government, represented by the President of the Republic, Mr. Alberto Fujimori, reiterated at Beijing its belief that women should control their own destiny, and undertook with determination to implement the agreements and commitments of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which we are reaffirming today.

Accordingly, the Peruvian Government created in 1996 the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Human Development in order to promote and harmonize public policies, in particular government policies, aimed at the advancement of women, thus taking a historic step towards integrating the gender approach and the women's agenda into national priorities.

Furthermore, the 2000-2005 national plan to ensure equal opportunities for men and women is being implemented by the Ministry over which I have the

honour to preside. The realization of that plan involves all sectors of the State.

In accordance with our political will to advance the status of women, other, higher-level bodies have been created, such as the congressional Women's Committee and the Public Defender's Office for Women.

For more than 12 years my country was the victim of terrorist attacks that isolated us and gave rise to uncertainty about our future. During that time, women played an important role, establishing a social network and deploying the necessary efforts to weather the crisis. I think we were very brave in the face of this terrorist violence, which resulted in the murders of thousands of women leaders, municipal authorities and innocent men and women, and of thousands of policemen and soldiers. It was a horrific situation for us, but we did not give in. We do not wish to remember that time and thus relive our suffering, but neither do we wish to forget, so that we may prevent this from ever happening again.

That is why the Peruvian people supported the firm decision of our President to eliminate terrorism, and today peace and democracy prevail in Peru.

Government policy for the next five years includes the following priorities: the struggle against poverty; the creation of jobs; modernization; and the overall development of our country.

The efforts that have been made to alleviate poverty through social programmes aimed at women have taken a quantum leap forward. Schools have been created that teach leadership and negotiating skills, foster self-esteem and provide the training that facilitates women's entry into the labour force.

Legal standards are now in place in the area of employment and wages which penalize employers that discriminate against women by paying them lower wages than men. The right of women to prenatal and post-partum leave has been re-established, as well as the right to breastfeed for one hour a day. Laws have also been passed that prohibit the firing of women due to pregnancy.

Initiatives have been taken to increase the participation of women in the labour force by offering them training, counselling, revolving loans and through the establishment of small and micro-enterprises, which have become sources of jobs for other women.

We want our women to be productive and economically independent so that day by day they will become less and less subject to mistreatment.

Acknowledging the importance of the political participation of women, in 1997 the Government enacted a law on quotas for municipal and parliamentary elections which has already produced positive results. In 1999 women tripled their presence at the level of local government, and twice as many women will be represented at the next session of Congress, set to begin on 28 July. This measure has made it possible for those women who are leaders of urban, rural and sports organizations as well as women from all walks of life to take up the challenge of participating in political life.

Breaking with tradition, two women have presided over Congress in recent years, and women have also chaired various committees within this important legislative body.

Women in Peru today have access to decision-making posts and positions of power, and can have an effect in bringing about the necessary changes to consolidate a fairer society in which there is gender equality.

Acknowledging that the elimination of family violence is an indispensable condition for human development to take place, our efforts have given priority to this area. Thus, the legislation on family violence enacted in 1997 has been progressively fine-tuned on the basis of international standards and agreements, to guarantee greater protection to victims. In this connection, we are promoting the establishment of comprehensive, efficient and high-quality care centres which are completely free of charge and which provide users police, legal, psychological, social and medical care, as well as the services of a prosecutor for family matters. These centres, known as women's emergency centres, have been set up at the national level and have served to encourage more women to break their silence. It is silence that very often causes millions of women throughout the world to live hoping that their situation will change while they do nothing.

Our Government has understood that to invest in the elimination of family violence is to invest in our development, since the culture of peace that we aspire to must be consolidated from the home while strengthening families so that they may behave democratically and respect the rights of their members.

The family, which is regarded as the basic unit of society, should be linked by love and respect and not by violence and mistreatment. That is why this year has been designated in my country as the year to combat family violence, in order to give greater attention and effect to these measures. We have undertaken the task of encouraging men to change, to assume their family responsibilities and to manage their emotions so as to allow their homes to become harmonious and peaceful spaces in which the development of family members takes place actively.

We acknowledge that health is a basic human right, a right that includes sexual and reproductive rights. We do not promote abortion as a family planning method, and in this regard our Government has been committing appropriate resources for Peruvian women to be able to decide for themselves the size of their families and when they want to have relations, how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, have greater access to health services and to the different reproductive health options.

In order to lower and eliminate maternal mortality rates, child and maternity insurance was recently established for all the women of my country, and measures to prevent adolescent pregnancies have been reinforced. I do not wish to see, either in my country or in the world, adolescents become pregnant as a result of an accident, lack of experience or of lack of information.

Since education is the keystone to building an egalitarian and democratic society, a number of measures have been taken to increase school attendance of young girls in the educational system. We have placed special emphasis on health protection and care through free school insurance for all of my country's students. We have carried out mass campaigns in preventing sexual and child abuse. Our efforts have been centred on bridging gender gaps in girls' school attendance rates. This has been reflected in the changes in attitude of fathers, who have historically given priority to the education of their male children. Another indicator is that the number of women between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age attending colleges and universities now equals that of men.

The Acting President: I would like to inform the representative of Peru that her time has expired and that she may wish to conclude her statement now.

Mrs. Cuculiza (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): In the fight to combat female illiteracy, we have succeeded in reducing the illiteracy rate of women from 18.3 per cent, when I took office, to 7.8 per cent in 1999.

What we have achieved in Peru illustrates the fact that when there is political will and the willingness to work, seemingly impossible goals can be achieved. This is why ministries for women's affairs are in the hands of women, see through the eyes of women and feel with the hearts of women. This year we had the honour to preside over the eighth session of the regional conference on women in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the Lima Consensus was unanimously adopted. That document represents the position of our region at this important special session of the General Assembly.

The arduous tasks of promoting respect and recognition of the rights of women is a task incumbent upon us all. That is why I wish to say loud and clear that my Government pledges not to backtrack one step on regional consensuses and to continue resolutely to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. We women cannot wait any longer. We cannot remain silent. The time has come for our voices to be heard and for us to move from words to deeds.

We are entering a new century, the century of women. We are going to show that when women work, problems, difficulties and pain do not exist, and that women make headway because they were born courageous. In closing, I would once again like to say that the future of the entire world is in the hands of women and that we will work for the women of the world and for the women of the countries most in need, as well as for our girls. May God bless you and may you all return safely to your countries.

The Acting President: I would kindly like to remind delegations that, in accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at the 1st plenary meeting of its twenty-third special session, statements in the debate in plenary meeting should not exceed seven minutes, in order to accommodate every speaker on the list at each meeting.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Julienne Ngo Som, Minister for Women's Affairs of Cameroon.

Mrs. Ngo Som (Cameroon): I would like to thank the President for giving my delegation the opportunity

to make a statement during this very important special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

Taking the floor for the first time, the delegation of Cameroon under my leadership would like to congratulate the President and wish him even greater success, and the guidance of God, for the rest of his mandate.

The Beijing Platform for Action has been implemented under a macroeconomic context characterized by a severe economic and financial crisis which has affected my country for more than half a decade. As a result, the Cameroon Government was obliged to reduce expenditures in social sectors. This has led to the deterioration of the living conditions of most Cameroonians, including women.

There is no doubt that the Cameroon Government has the requisite political will and is committed to the advancement of women. This political will was reaffirmed by the adoption in 1999 of a national policy declaration on the integration of women in development. The general objective of this policy is to create a national framework for the implementation of the priority areas defined in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Permit me to review eight critical areas of this Platform, and to look at what has been achieved by the Government of Cameroon so far.

In order to implement the recommendations related to the critical area of women and poverty alleviation, income-generating opportunities for women have been identified in the following sectors: agriculture, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture, environment, medicinal plants, horticulture, trade, the informal sector, handicrafts, tourism and textiles. In 1998, a national strategy declaration against poverty was published, with a special plan of action to fight poverty among women. A national survey using a participatory approach has just been carried out. Its objective was to determine the principal causes of poverty among the women of Cameroon.

The Government has strengthened and increased the number of technical organs for the promotion of socio-economic activities for women. As a result, more and more women are getting involved in income-generating activities, including home economics, food production, cassava processing, the informal sector, trading, tourism, and so on. Credit schemes are being developed at the grass-roots level to help women finance their income-generating activities.

On education and training, special attention has been paid to advocacy and social marketing vis-à-vis parents and cultural and religious leaders. The aim is to create public awareness about the need to treat boys and girls equitably when it comes to schooling. As a result, girls' enrolment in primary school has gone up. With respect to non-formal education, the literacy rate of adult women has also improved.

Turning to the issue of women and health, government policies and strategies following the Beijing Conference have created a strong public awareness of the need to tackle women's health problems. Several health and nutrition surveys have been carried out to show the scope of these problems.

Sensitization campaigns have been carried out on violence against women and the girl child, and information has been circulated to the public with respect to the consequences of violence against women.

On the question of women in power and decision-making positions, the democratization of public life has attracted a large number of women into politics. Today, many women are members of several political parties. In the ruling party, 23 per cent of posts of responsibility are held by women. In the parliament and the local councils, women represent 5.5 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. There are four women members of the Government and two secretaries-general of ministries. The private sector is also improving the situation with respect to women in decision-making positions.

Turning to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, the Government of Cameroon has shown its commitment to the advancement of women through the creation of strong administrative and technical institutions at the central, intermediary and community levels. At the central level, there is the Ministry of Women's Affairs, with branches at the provincial, divisional and subdivisional levels. Technical organs, including women's empowerment centres and appropriate technology centres, have been created for the training and capacity-building of women at the grass-roots level. In addition to this government institutional framework, there are networks of organizations, female professional associations and

non-governmental organizations working for women's rights and education, against violence and discrimination, and for the socio-economic advancement of women.

On women's human rights, Cameroon has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Relevant policies have been formulated to promote the human rights of the Cameroonian woman. A national committee has been set up and a plan of action has been developed to review all laws which discriminate against women.

With respect to the girl child, our national policy emphasizes the elimination of all forms of discrimination and detrimental cultural practices against the girl child, including sexual mutilation and exploitation.

On women and environment, efforts have been made to create awareness on the role of women in the sustainable exploitation of environmental and biological resources and on the need to prevent pollution and keep the environment clean.

As members can see, my country has made significant efforts for the advancement of Cameroonian women, despite a macroeconomic context characterized by economic crisis and an unsustainable debt burden. The Government has created an enabling environment for the promotion of women, as a result of which our society is gradually becoming more and more gender-conscious and gender-sensitive. The mainstreaming of gender issues in major sectors of national life has become a priority, and gender mainstreaming is gaining ground in many national development programmes and projects.

Mr. Morel (Seychelles), Vice-President, took the Chair.

From 1995 to date, some progress has been made, though not without significant difficulties, and although a lot is yet to be done. The major obstacle encountered by my country in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has been the lack of financial resources. A substantial amount of money which could have been allocated to projects for the promotion of women has been used to service the heavy debt Cameroon owes to international creditors. Other obstacles have been encountered with respect to poverty alleviation, education, health, power and decision-making positions, women's rights, gender mainstreaming and women and environment.

My delegation has noted that, besides these obstacles, new trends, issues and concerns have emerged, which need to be addressed if the goals of equality, development and peace are to be attained for all in this new millennium. Let me cite but a few: globalization and new information technologies; the role of women in the promotion of peace; the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially among adolescents; trafficking in children and the exploitation of the girl child; persistent poverty among women; the deterioration of women's health; and the need for women's involvement in the promotion of their national culture and moral values for sustainable development. Those obstacles, together with the emerging issues, concerns and new trends of which I spoke earlier, are to us a timely signal that, although appreciable ground has been covered in our efforts to advance women, a lot more needs to be done.

The head of State of Cameroon, His Excellency President Paul Biya, has made the substantial reduction of poverty and the improvement of the living conditions of the vulnerable groups, especially women, the cornerstone of his presidential mandate. In that perspective, my delegation hopes that Cameroon will benefit from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative so as to enable the Government to fulfil its commitments, in collaboration and sustainable partnership with other friendly Governments, international organizations, the United Nations system, traditional and religious leaders, non-governmental organizations and, above all, with men and women themselves. In that way we could hope to make a significant contribution to gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: The Chair would like to urge delegations to respect the seven-minute time frame; we are running out of time.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Nezha Chekrouni, Secretary of State, Ministry of Social Development, Solidarity, Employment and Vocational Training of Morocco.

Mrs. Chekrouni (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to convey to the Assembly the greetings and best wishes of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco, who is following this

special session of the General Assembly with all due attention and interest.

On behalf of the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco, I congratulate the Republic of Namibia on the election of His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab to the presidency of the Assembly at this special session, which is devoted to women at the dawn of the third millennium. The session is intended to marshal support for true gender equality, development and peace.

We note with satisfaction that certain legitimate ambitions of women throughout the world are being attained, and this is due to the joint efforts of all; but women continue to suffer some setbacks. There are still areas, particularly in education and training, where the rates of school enrolment, illiteracy and scientific learning require more attention. Some major problems also persist in the area of health care, where the rate of infant and maternal mortality keeps increasing.

Women are still suffering from physical and mental abuse caused by violence and by the spread of AIDS, whose devastating consequences, affecting women in particular and causing a growing number of orphans, is felt in all societies.

We should recall here the great attention focused on this issue by our late sovereign His Majesty King Hassan II and the tremendous efforts he made regarding the promotion of women. These efforts are reflected in several major achievements, such as the consolidation of equality between the sexes in rights and duties, through incorporating many laws, particularly the civil status law; by respecting the political will manifested in the involvement of women in decision-making; by increasing their public and political participation; life management; by their integration within the representative institutions; and by becoming members of regional and national representative and executive bodies. For the first time in the history of Morocco, on 13 August 1997, women were appointed ministers, serving in the cabinet of that time, as well as in the present Government.

Building on the legacy of his father, His Majesty King Mohamed VI gave women's issues utmost importance to ensure their promotion and to defend their rights. On the occasion of His Majesty's first speech since ascending to the throne, as he had done on many other occasions and in other initiatives, he stressed the importance of promoting women's conditions, legally, socially, economically and politically; and for the first time he appointed a woman as one of his counsellors, while he made the condition of women a top priority. His Majesty missed no opportunity to stress the increasingly important role played by Moroccan women in the modernization process.

Morocco is also concerned with social aspects, because it is clear that respect for women's rights must become part of our common culture. The promotion of women occupies a special place in the objectives set by the educational institutions on all levels within the context of respect for human rights and the culture of peace.

By decree of his Majesty the King, a universal strategy was elaborated placing women's issues at the centre of its policies. A permanent ministerial commission for women was established. The promotion of women was placed among the top priorities of the Five-Year Plan 1999-2003 for Economic and Social Development. Morocco also developed and sponsored programmes of education and training and consciousness-raising campaigns against violence towards women. Thus, the first national campaign to combat violence towards women was organized, and a partnership agreement was signed for the first time between the Ministry for Human Rights and the Moroccan Association of Lawyers, which counts among its objectives the support of women and girls in difficulty.

In order to increase the rate of school enrolment among young girls, Morocco has made tremendous efforts. This is reflected in an increase in the educational segment of the budget and by the Parliament's adoption of the application of laws for the implementation of the National Charter on education and training, which enforces compulsory education from 6 to 15 years of age. The Charter also stresses informal education and the creation of collective schools through partnership contracts between the private and public sectors. In this area, we have to pay tribute to Moroccan non-governmental organizations and to civil society for making notable efforts to improve the conditions of women and girls in our country.

Globalization of the economy and new technology and information strategies have impeded the attainment of objectives, especially gender equality

between men and women; this results from various political and economic disparities. How can third world countries participate in globalization and development when they are suffering from problems such as debt? The condition of women requires solidarity and coordination. That is what encouraged His Majesty to write off African debts to Morocco. We would like to make widespread this type of solidarity in favour of women.

Morocco is proud to be one of those countries that promote the rule of law essential for the respect for human rights, and especially women's rights. In this regard, His Majesty the King committed himself to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and devoted himself to ensuring the equality of the sexes, basing it on the teachings of Islam and Morocco's cultural particularities and the international Convention that Morocco has signed. The lofty objectives of this session are to strengthen women's rights and to find appropriate solutions to the many problems they face throughout the world. That is why we express our true hope for building a better future based on peace and equality between men and women, in order to guarantee equality between the sexes. We are aware of the enormity of the effort that is still required from all of us and the tremendous challenges of the future. We should all work together to put forth the most suitable ways to ensure women's dignity.

Under His Majesty's leadership, Morocco reiterates its commitment to promote the consolidation of women's rights throughout the world, relying on its authentic civilization, renewed modernism, unique identity, its great religious and moral values, and its multicultural character.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alberto Paolino, Minister for Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and Deputy Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister of Sao Tome and Principe.

Mr. Paolino (Sao Tome and Principe) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to express my warmest thanks to the Secretariat of the United Nations, the body that has organized the event that has brought us together here in New York. I would also like to wish the greatest success for our work and to express the hope that our results will be translated into realities in all of our countries.

In Sao Tome and Principe, an archipelago made up of two small islands, considered one of the least developed countries, the population in general, and women in particular, are facing the problems of our time, a time of change, of challenges, of a quest for new achievements; of problems that are placed in our paths and which we have to tackle in order to survive as free and independent States.

The dizzying changes that the world has been facing in recent times have made women's problems even more critical than ever before. The holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 provided an excellent opportunity for the representatives of more than 100 nations to carry out an in-depth discussion of the responsibilities of all — State institutions and non-governmental organizations — with regard to this sector of our population.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was ratified by Sao Tome and Principe only last year, but its spirit and principles, which were already apparent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have always been a part of our country's constitutions and are taken into account in government programmes with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Starting with Beijing, there was a new attempt to adopt an integrated approach to problems affecting women, which has enabled significant progress to take place. Indeed, the national authorities have increased the awareness of the need effectively to ensure the contribution of our country's women, and women themselves are participating more actively in the design and implementation of solutions that allow them to play a role in national development, primarily in agriculture, raising livestock, trade and crafts.

Despite these achievements, however, society in Sao Tome and Principe is still marked by great disparities based on gender and stereotypes that seem to attribute supposed superiority to men.

As we all know, changes in attitude take a long time and are very difficult to achieve. However, it cannot be denied that the major conferences organized by the United Nations in the 1990s, such as the World Summit for Children and the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, have given new vitality to the cause of women.

We have set up an institutional structure — the department for the promotion of women and the family — which is currently the responsibility of the Prime Minister's Cabinet. This department is the body responsible for following up on the implementation of government policies and activities with respect to women and the family.

After Beijing, this department supported by civil society, set up a commission which drew up a proposal for a national platform for action which should make it possible to implement the outcomes of this conference. That document was then presented to civil society, which contributed to enriching and validating it. The conditions for the development of a plan of action for women of Sao Tome and Principe, to be implemented by the Government, have also been created. At the same time, several projects have been designed to improve the situation of women in rural and urban areas, among which I should like to stress the project to combat poverty. The Government has adopted constructive measures aimed at facilitating the participation of women in decision-making.

The authorities are in the process of creating professional centres open to both men and women. Furthermore, we have also begun to introduce appropriate technologies in rural communities in order to ease the lives of the inhabitants in general, and women in particular. Furthermore, opportunities for women to gain access to technical, advanced and professional training, as well as training in other areas, have been enhanced, so that today, 40 per cent of civil service positions in Sao Tome and Principe are held by women, the health and education sectors being those with the highest percentage.

Furthermore, the Government is implementing programmes which will have an impact on women and children in particular. These include reproductive health programmes, and measures to combat AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases and malaria.

Generally speaking, in recent years many associations promoting women's rights have emerged in Sao Tome and Principe. Various non-governmental organizations dealing with women's problems have been integrated into a federation, the women's forum of Sao Tome and Principe, which enables them to organize themselves better and makes it easier for them to achieve their goals.

I have just provided the Assembly with a very general overview of the situation of women in Sao Tome and Principe at the dawn of the new millennium. But the positive achievements have not caused the Government to forget that considerable work remains to be done, not only because of attitudes but also, and above all, because of the very difficult economic situation which Sao Tome and Principe, like most developing countries, is facing.

Nevertheless, my Government believes that one of its most important objectives is the real participation of women who, let us not forget, represent more than half of the population of Sao Tome and Principe.

Our Government is thus fully determined to take the necessary steps so that, in Sao Tome and Principe, being a woman means being a full-fledged citizen.

The Acting President: Once again, I must appeal to representatives to be good enough to keep silent in the General Assembly Hall in order to maintain the dignity of the Assembly and out of courtesy to the next speaker. I thank them in advance.

(*spoke in French*)

The next speaker is Her Excellency Mrs. Fatimé Kimto, Minister for Social Action and Family of Chad.

Mrs. Kimto (Chad) (*spoke in French*): It is with real pleasure that I am taking the floor on this solemn occasion of the holding of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly to express, on behalf of my head of State, His Excellency Idriss Deby, President of the Republic of Chad, of my delegation and on my own behalf, our most sincere and warm greetings.

Allow me, also, to express, through you, Sir, my congratulations to the members of the Bureau who have been chosen to preside over these deliberations.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express, from this rostrum, the hope that the people, and particularly the women, of Chad, place in this special session which has brought together the sons and daughters of the entire world to assess the commitments undertaken by Governments in 1995 in Beijing during the World Conference on Women.

This session is of special importance for us because of its subject, which deals with gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first

century in the form of an assessment of the distance covered in the five years after Beijing.

It is no secret that, until recently, my country, Chad, had been undergoing many troubles after independence. Since his accession to the supreme office in 1999, His Excellency President Idriss Deby has done his utmost to ensure that my country, Chad, can again take its place among nations as a State based on the rule of law, governed by democratic institutions.

This approach has been characterized by several stages: the establishment of a multi-party system; the organization of a Sovereign National Conference; the liberation of the private press; and the adoption of the constitution of the Republic, which enshrines the principle of gender equality. Hence, all the conditions have been brought together, allowing the people of Chad to express themselves freely, thereby favouring dialogue rather than the language of arms.

More recently, the Government adopted a draft law to ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

Despite all of these undeniable efforts, some forms of armed opposition remain in our country. That is why human development is, I hardly need recall, greatly conditioned by the absence of peace, which has a serious negative impact on people's living conditions and keeps them in extreme poverty. Women, who constitute 52 per cent of that population, are the principal victims. To this, we must add ignorance, illiteracy and a low rate of school enrolment for girls.

With respect to the 12 priority areas set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of the Republic of Chad has established a multisectoral national programme of action and adopted a national policy for integrating women in development. This policy, enacted into law, aims at enhancing the legal status of women; improving the living conditions of women; enhancing women's resources in all sectors; promoting women's economic status; and improving the institutional framework for the integration of women in development. The implementation of this programme has been undertaken through the following steps: the ratification and dissemination of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the establishment of a technical body for the promotion of girls' education; the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the recent endorsement of a draft law on reproductive health; the integration of the gender concept and of education on family life into school programmes; the impending enactment of a draft code for the family; and the establishment, within the Ministry of Civil Service, Labour and Job Promotion, of an entity to monitor the participation of women in administration.

As improving our people's living conditions is one of its priorities, the Government of the Republic of Chad, with the support of the agencies of the United Nations and certain African regional institutions, is preparing a broad poverty-reduction strategy. In the meantime, however, it has launched an important pilot project for reducing poverty and helping women, which is already under way. Along these lines, the Government has chosen to develop education and training for women with a view to encouraging their access to economic power. A national solidarity fund has been set up to that end.

In the area of peace, the Government has closely involved civil society in the resolution of conflicts. In this respect, I would cite the establishment of a women's peace network; the establishment of a network of student ambassadors for peace; and the organization on 8 March 2000 of a day of prayer for a culture of peace, tolerance, love and forgiveness.

With respect to promoting the status of women, noteworthy efforts have been made by the Government. Women have been nominated to high-level posts in the Government, diplomacy, central administration and territorial communities.

Despite the Government's continuously reaffirmed political will, the progress achieved in the various areas remains weak with respect to female representation in decision-making bodies. The work ahead will be arduous, but we are convinced that the situation of women will markedly improve in the next five years on the basis of the efforts made by States and the new strategies to emerge from this special session.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity very sincerely to thank the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, whose help has enabled many in our delegation to participate in these deliberations.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Ana Elisa Osorio, Vice-Minister of Health of Venezuela.

Ms. Osorio (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Government of Venezuela, I wish to convey our greetings and delight at the efforts made by the United Nations system in convening this special session, which is so important to the achievement of gender equality.

We have attended this special session with the firm goal of reaffirming our commitment to the Platform for Action agreed on at Beijing five years ago. For Venezuela and the rest of Latin America, Beijing was undoubtedly a fundamental landmark for the advancement of gender equality, which we recently reaffirmed in the Lima Consensus, adopted at the eighth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We wish to share the extraordinary success in our country of the adoption of a Constitution with a gender perspective through a constituent process that took into account the specific needs, rights and aspirations of Venezuelan women. Henceforth in my country, male and female citizens alike will be called on for public service; children's planning will take girls into account as well as boys; chairwomen will preside alongside chairmen; women will work alongside men; and at home, father and mother will enjoy equal importance and equal protections.

We are entering the new millennium with a Constitution that is the project of a country with a gender vision and with a leader, President Hugo Chávez Frías, who is deeply committed to it. The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela protects families, mothers and fathers, establishes the right of couples to decide the number of children they wish to conceive and guarantees them adequate information to ensure the exercise of that right.

In Venezuela, we have created the National Institute for Women with a major increase in the allocation of budgetary resources that will help establish the office of Women's Ombudsman envisaged in the Equal Opportunities Act enacted in 1993.

Another achievement has been the constitutional recognition of boys and girls as enjoying full rights. Their higher interests and the absolute priority accorded to the formulation of policy for boys and girls were reasserted by the recent entry into force of an organic law to protect children and adolescents. This law stipulates that boys, girls and adolescents have the right to be informed and educated in sexual and reproductive health so that they may engage in sex and parenthood responsibly, healthily, voluntarily and without risk. It also ensures access to high-quality services and programmes for sexual and reproductive health that protect the confidentiality of boys, girls and adolescents.

In the context of the reform and restructuring of the health sector, the National Programme for Sexual and Reproductive Health was recently established. Besides institutionalizing national commissions to prevent early pregnancy and to promote breastfeeding, the Programme is also charged with integrating all health programmes so as to guarantee comprehensive health care to all women.

One priority of our Government is the prevention of teenage pregnancy, which has become a public health problem. In order to address this situation, we have drafted the Second National Plan for the Prevention and Care of Early Pregnancy for the period 1999-2004.

Health and education have been priorities for President Hugo Chávez. In this respect, our Government has decided to address the adverse effects of globalization that have affected women in particular and led to the feminization of poverty and to a decline of health and education indicators, resulting in high rates of maternal mortality, increased incidence of AIDS among women, breast and cervical cancer and other pathologies that primarily affect poor women.

Moreover, within the framework of health care reform, the Bolivarian Constitution stipulates health care as a social right and that the State must guarantee it and universal social security, explicitly including housewives. The latter have been challenged by the growing commercialization of the health care sector in our country, which has resulted in the inaccessibility and deterioration of health-care services, affecting women, girls and boys above all.

In Venezuela, we have launched the establishment of a new management model for ambulatory health care, the Comprehensive Health Care Model, which breaks with the practice of dividing the provision of services, promotes preventive action and reduces the

number of lost opportunities that have undoubtedly affected women foremost.

Our health-care plan also prioritizes the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS among girls, boys, adolescents and women, who enjoy priority treatment with anti-retroviral medicine to block the vertical transmission of HIV/AIDS. Most importantly, our plan incorporates education and advice on sexual and reproductive health and the gender equality perspective in school textbooks.

With respect to the prevention of violence against women, since 1998 we have had a Law on Violence against Women and the Family that punishes all kinds of family violence, sexual violence and provides machinery for assistance to victims of these situations. Our Institute for Women has also promoted a series of activities in order to disseminate knowledge about the law and to train the different state authorities to implement it.

In this respect, some non-governmental organizations have made important efforts in organizing community groups for the prevention of violence against women and in training programmes for the police force and health-care personnel as well as education for the adequate assistance of victims of this serious problem.

In Beijing, the Government of Venezuela promised to substantially reduce poverty. The National Institute for Women promoted an employment plan for women, management training for microenterprises, and a strategic alliance with the Bank of the People to develop a credit line for women.

In Venezuela, the political participation of women is still an area where much work remains to be done. Even though women have made significant progress in professional training, their participation is still very low when it comes to the highest levels of the executive and legislative power.

Our delegation has played an active and committed role in the negotiating process that began earlier this year in order to ensure that the achievements and obstacles, as well as the new challenges that have emerged in the past five years, be reflected in the Platform for Action. Thus, Venezuela has worked arduously in order to define new actions that would make it possible to move forward in the implementation of the Platform for Action and that reaffirm its content. All of this shows our clear commitment to women in Venezuela and the world.

On this very important occasion Venezuela urges governments to recognize the potential of women in achieving gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

The President: The next speaker is Her Excellency Mrs. Isabelle Machik Ruth Tshombe, Vice-Minister for Social and Family Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mrs. Tshombe (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to carry out a very pleasant duty, that of warmly congratulating you and Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the General Assembly, for the trust placed in you to chair this special session on the five-year evaluation of the Beijing+5 Platform for Action. I would also like to convey on behalf of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the greetings of the Congolese people and, in particular, those of the Congolese women.

The special session entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" provides the international community with the unique opportunity to meet and combine their efforts in order to reaffirm and ensure the implementation of commitments taken at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, as well as the quest for solutions within the twelve priorities identified which remain major objectives to be achieved.

My country places particular importance on the matter of equality between men and women. That is why in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, we have set up a national action programme which is based on the Beijing Platform for Action. This has made it possible to adopt measures that would ensure equality in women's participation in political, economic, social and cultural life at the national and local level. We are convinced that this action plan is a great source of inspiration for the development of programmes and strategies to promote women, without negating our traditional and cultural values, taking into account our specific realities.

The Sixth African Regional Conference in Addis Ababa in September of last year was, for my country, an opportunity to assess the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms with respect to the 12 priority areas. This has made it possible to integrate in the three-year plan for the period from 1997 to 2000 the following objectives: to ensure the economic promotion of women through encouraging female entrepreneurism; to ensure the legal and cultural promotion of women through information on women's rights; to ensure the social promotion of women through training, the enhancement of female human capital, as well as the status of women; to improve the nutrition of women and children through the development of primary health-care programmes as well as the alleviation of women's daily workload; and to help women in rural areas through technical, material and financial means.

With respect to these objectives, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has used the resolutions of the National Forum on Rights and Leadership of the Congolese Women held in September 1996, to develop the National Programme for the Promotion of Congolese Women. This five-year programme takes up the twelve critical areas of Beijing.

From the point of view of strengthening the institutional mechanism for women, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has set up a national council and provincial councils for women, which would be consultation bodies that are made up of experts who represent public institutions, non-governmental organizations, unions, religious denominations, and delegates from the United Nations bodies, who take part as observers.

Along the same lines, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has also begun the implementation of a national dialogue, follow-up and assessment mechanism to look at policies for promoting equality between men and women. It has also adapted national legislative texts to conform with ratified international instruments.

However, there is still much work left to be done. Given the very difficult economic situation, which has been worsened by a war which is unfairly imposed on us, the efforts made by my Government for the implementation of the different programmes for women is not developing in the way that we wish. I would like to seize this opportunity to launch an urgent appeal to the international community so that they may improve their financial assistance to developing countries in order to create the proper conditions so that men, as well as women, can become further involved in the promotion of equal opportunity between men and women and to translate this into deeds.

The important role that women play in the development process is clear to all and my delegation feels that the special session will offer an opportunity to assess the relevance of an idea contained in the Programme for Action which establishes a link between the promotion of women and economic and social progress in the world.

We must all make a firm commitment in the quest for sustainable development to ensure women full participation in economic life and to effectively combat poverty primarily in the areas of education, in training and in health and to break with unacceptable habits which have led societies to neglect a part of their human resources.

However, for many countries, inadequate means devoted to development, budgetary constraints and restrictions are still major obstacles delaying the achievement of the Beijing Programme for Action.

We are convinced that an active partnership with all of the components of society, accompanied by solid cooperation, are part of the solutions which could make our efforts successful.

We cannot have equality or development if we do not have peace and justice. I should like to remind the international community of the aggression of which my country is a victim as a result of the coalition of armed forces of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations.

I wish also to deplore the peculiar silence of some in the light of the serious human rights violations that are being perpetrated against women and children. My country also deplores the absence of an explicit condemnation of the barbaric murders of 15 Congolese women, buried alive by Rwandan troops in the eastern part of my country. Do we have to reach a certain number of atrocities before they can be considered flagrant human rights violations?

For us, each and every victim of this evil war — man, woman or child — is one death too many. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has always

recognized the valuable contribution of women to the promotion of the ideals of peace and solidarity. That is why women must be involved in mechanisms for the prevention and settlement of conflicts, and their participation in peacekeeping operations must be strengthened so that they can make available to humankind their capacity for consensus-building, conflict resolution and peace-building.

Furthermore, the international community must enhance its cooperation in the area of conflict prevention and peacekeeping, and ensure that awareness-raising measures are taken to sensitize people to the causes of violence that produce refugees and displaced persons, in particular women and children.

Peace is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. How can we talk about the status of women and their access to decision-making posts, of improving their living conditions through quality health care and through education, or of their effective participation in sustainable development efforts at a time when the country is occupied by foreign aggressors — the Rwandans, Ugandans and Burundis.

A large part of the population is in the forest, having fled the fighting, where women and girls suffer from malnutrition and are the victims of murder and rape, which leads to unwanted pregnancies and to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, since our aggressors come from neighbouring countries where there is a high incidence of HIV/AIDS. The spread of the AIDS virus represents a time bomb for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and nullifies the efforts made by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme in the combat against the AIDS pandemic.

Since 5 June last, the city of Kisangani has been the seat of bloody fighting between Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers, claiming more than 700 lives and injuring more than 100 among the Congolese civilian population. These unacceptable battles between two foreign armies on Congolese territory are continuing in the presence of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and despite the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement.

These atrocities have outraged the Congolese people and women in particular. In the light of the passive, even ambiguous attitude and the ongoing silence of the international community, Congolese women, through me, are calling on the international community once again and on those who are dedicated to the ideals of peace and justice to condemn this aggression, to force the aggressors to leave Congolese soil and return to their respective territories, so that the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo can continue with national reconstruction.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Shaikha Hind Bint Sulman Al-Khalifa, Under-Secretary and Assistant of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Bahrain.

Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour for me to represent my country, Bahrain, at this important international gathering — the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

I should like to convey to all present the regards of His Highness Prince Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, Prince of the State of Bahrain, and his wish for the successful outcome of this session, with a view to promoting the prosperity and well-being of the peoples of the world.

I am pleased also to convey the gratitude and appreciation of Bahrain to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his initiative to hold this special session and for the attention that has been given by the United Nations under his tenure to issues related to women and their role in the contemporary world.

The continued work of the international community over five decades has achieved an international consensus on reasserting the right of women to development and their integration in all international, regional and national economic and social activities. The last few decades have witnessed the holding of a series of world conferences aimed at promoting the role of women in achieving comprehensive and sustainable development, beginning in Mexico in 1975 and through Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985.

The holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 under the slogan "Equality, development and peace", which this special session has

been convened to review, was an important world event and a turning point of great significance to international efforts to advance the status of women. It focused on the role of women in development in its work, Declaration and Platform for Action, in a manner that made it clear that there can be no development without the effective participation of women and that sustainable development can be achieved only through the improved economic and social status of women.

That call was reiterated at various international conferences, focusing on the importance of investing in individuals and on their health, training and education, and on elaborating programmes of work to enable women to participate and contribute fully and effectively to development.

All of these ongoing efforts have promoted the role of women and have led to the recognition that their problems are part and parcel of the problems of society as a whole; that finding a solution to the problems of women cannot be done in isolation, without dealing with the problems of society in general; and that humankind cannot perform at its best without the participation of women. It has become very clear that genuine progress and development can be achieved only through the effective participation of women on an equal footing with men in all areas.

In conformity with this comprehensive vision, many charters and international declarations have been issued that promote the ideals of equality, fairness, equal opportunity and non-discrimination between men and women and that have opened new horizons for the greater participation of women in the comprehensive development of all societies.

Five years after the holding of the Beijing Conference, we believe that now is the time for a careful review of women's issues in the light of the great changes our world has witnessed. Those changes — which include globalization, trade liberalization and the restructuring of communications and information technologies — make it clear that there are new challenges confronting the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Those challenges urgently require a greater awareness of the role of women in the advancement of society as a whole and in full partnership with men.

There is also an urgent need to expand cooperation between Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in order to implement the Platform for Action and to establish the necessary mechanisms and the national constitutional arrangements for follow-up on the achievements of the Platform and promote the central role of women in raising future generations to be prepared to deal with those challenges. This should be done without regard to regional, economic or national characteristics, the religious, cultural and historic backgrounds of States, or the cultural, economic or political regimes they may adopt.

As a developing State, Bahrain long ago realized the importance of the role of women in the development of society, and has made great efforts to improve the economic and social status of women within society to open up new opportunities for them to participate and to secure their present and prepare for their future. This position has been fully reflected in the government programme of 1999, in which women's issues took their appropriate place. The programme reasserted the fact that the role of women should not be limited only to promoting all aspects of development, but that it should extend to shaping the future and determining the direction of efforts on behalf of all society.

The women of Bahrain made new gains when it was declared that they would be able to participate in the next session of the consultative council. The lofty place accorded women in the State of Bahrain was also reflected in our 1973 Constitution, which pays great attention to the family as the basis of society in order to strengthen society and protect its religious and moral values while also protecting mothers and children. This was also reasserted through various laws that have given women full rights on the basis of Shariah law and its high moral and religious values.

The national report on the status of women in Bahrain has been submitted to the special session and includes statistics underscoring the great progress achieved by Bahrain in the implementation of the 12 basic areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Platform for Action, whose review we are here to undertake, was based on women's full participation in all efforts to develop society. We hope that the final document of this session will represent the beginning of a new era in helping developing countries implement their development policies, secure their social and economic progress and create a better future for coming generations.

Finally, I would like to thank the Assembly for its attention and I wish all of you every success in this meeting.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Ms. Rashida Ali Al-Hamadani, Chairperson of the Women's National Committee of Yemen.

Ms. Al-Hamadani (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour and pleasure to address the Assembly on behalf of the delegation of my country, the Republic of Yemen, and to convey to you the greetings and thanks of the women of Yemen for all your efforts in preparing and convening this gathering. We look forward at this session to further measures to strengthen the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his statement, in which he emphasized the issues of critical concern to women in the fields of education, health, poverty and violence. The Secretary-General also emphasized his concern for women and asserted that women are not just a part of the world, but that they are the foundation of its future. The Secretary-General's statement is indeed a vivid testimony of the high status of women in the world today. We hope to see the issues of critical concern to women among the priorities of the forthcoming Millennium Summit of the General Assembly.

Allow me to highlight some of the most significant achievements to have taken place in the lives of Yemeni women since the holding of the Beijing Conference in 1995. Women's issues have acquired greater importance and greater emphasis has been placed on them as a result of the accelerated international fundamental changes that have placed women at the centre of the activities of States and put them in the mainstream of overall development.

Yemen has moved towards democracy and a multiparty system with political organizations and parties in civil society and has developed various trade unions, and associations. Non-governmental organizations today play an important role in the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Among those organizations are the Association of Yemeni Women, the Yemeni Women's Planning Society, the Society for the Economic Empowerment of Women and the Society for the Advancement of Women. Some of those groups are participating in this session.

Women participate positively and concretely at all political and economical decision-making levels and take part in elections as both candidates and voters in urban and rural centres, thus fostering participation and true competition. They have also become active members of the executive offices of all the provinces of the Republic. Statistics show that the number of women voters taking part in the 1997 parliamentary elections in Yemen was 1,272,073, as compared to 478,700 in 1993. Recently, the first Yemeni woman ambassador was appointed to the friendly Kingdom of the Netherlands. A number of women have also assumed leading positions in both governmental and non-governmental bodies, as well as in political parties.

A department has been established within the central bureau of statistics to deal with gender-based statistics. The National Committee for Women, which was established under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister to prepare for Yemen's participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women, has been reorganized. This attests to the fact that there is a need to continue to implement the Platform. The Committee has been mandated to draw up national policies and strategies in all the critical areas defined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform. It is made up of women representatives from all governmental and non-governmental sectors. The Committee has recently drafted the second five-year plan for women, for the period 2000 to 2005, to be included within the Government's five-year plan. Other departments have been established in all ministries to implement strategies and policies on behalf of women.

Regarding poverty, the Government of Yemen has redoubled its efforts to address and reduce poverty; it has adopted a number of measures and implemented a number of programmes, including a social safety network, whose main beneficiaries are women.

The Government has taken action in the field of education to reduce the high rate of illiteracy among women and to close the gender gap, especially with respect to access to education, through a special strategy for girls. This commenced recently with support from a number of donor countries and international organizations led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Government has also formulated a strategy for the elimination of illiteracy and for adult education, and has enacted legislation with respect to teachers and teacher training. Here, let

me recall the old saying: "If you teach a man, you teach one individual; if you teach a woman, you teach a whole generation".

Yemen has adopted strategies for the employment and vocational training of women in keeping with the requirements of the labour market. It is to be noted that the constitution and laws of the Republic of Yemen guarantee the equality of men and women in terms of both rights and duties.

Turning to the health sector in Yemen, indicators show a considerable improvement in the level of health care for women, a reduced rate of maternal mortality, improved disease-control, reduced fertility rates and an increased use of contraception.

Having outlined the achievements we have made, I must also mention the obstacles that we are facing and that continue to impede the advancement of women in all fields. Some of these are institutional, others are geographic or social. Studies of schools and health-care facilities have shown that there is inadequate coverage in remote population centres and that there is a paucity of women teachers and health-care providers. Among the difficulties hindering the work of women in rural areas is scattered population and the lack of infrastructure, such as roads. The lack of water resources also affects development and the advancement of women, as well as the ability of women to acquire and store water to meet the minimal needs of families.

Let me recall that Yemen is host to a large number of refugees, most of whom are women and children who have been obliged by war and armed conflict in the Horn of Africa to endure difficult social, health and psychological conditions. In spite of our limited means and the economic hardships we are facing, the Government of my country is providing all necessary social and health-care services and shelter for those refugees, although those services may not be optimal. We must emphasize also the need to take all appropriate measures to alleviate the suffering of women and girls living under occupation, embargo or blockade.

We convey our deep gratitude to donor countries, to international organizations and to all other contributors to programmes for the advancement of women and, in particular, for comprehensive development. Here we wish to single out the Government of the friendly Kingdom of the Netherlands for its support for our women's unit in our efforts to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Dennie Wilson, Chairman of the delegation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Wilson (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Please permit me on behalf of my Government, to extend sincere congratulations to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

The stated purpose of this session is to reaffirm our commitment to the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, to review and appraise progress and to identify new challenges and trends to ensure that commitments for gender equality, development and peace are fully realized. I reaffirm my Government's commitment to implementing that vision in areas where we have not done so, with a sense of urgency.

Five years ago, the landmark Beijing Platform for Action was designed to place women's empowerment and the achievement of gender equality at the core of development thinking and planning. Further, while five years ago there was much planning to address the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes, my Government had not envisaged the obstacles which the negative impact of globalization and trade policies have placed in the path of implementing the high goals of the Platform for Action.

The well-being of our small island developing State has been rendered more vulnerable and more at risk by the adverse effects of globalization than by natural disasters such as an active volcano or hurricanes. The case study of the Windward Islands banana industry is relevant here. The decline in the banana industry due to challenges from "friendly" countries and to the subsequent ruling by the World Trade Organization has impacted not only on women, who comprise a large segment of the agricultural sector, but also on large numbers of the population at large. There is evidence that the living conditions of rural women have deteriorated, leading to increased feminization of poverty.

Indeed, poverty surveys have shown the increasing burden of poverty on women in the affected areas. My Government has recognized the need to move beyond these surveys, and has moved to provide credit facilities for women, in addition to subsidies, public assistance and public employment schemes in collaboration with the private sector.

My Government is also encouraged by the new policy direction of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank towards poverty reduction measures at the microlevel, and has introduced a gender focus in poverty reduction programmes.

My Government notes with grave concern that HIV/AIDS is having a devastating effect on all regions of the world. Indeed, statistics provided by the World Health Organization show that, in the Caribbean, women in the 15-to-29 age group are most affected. For developing States without adequate access to advanced medicine or to financial resources for such critical health needs, the cooperation of the international community is essential to assist in efforts to control and eradicate this scourge. My Government is committed to collaborating on a regional plan of action with the health sector to deal with the AIDS pandemic. In the interim, my Government is allocating resources for the care of affected persons and for adolescent reproductive care, as well as for a strengthened family-life education programme in schools.

Prior to the provisions in the Beijing Platform for Action, my Government had passed progressive legislation eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, thus establishing gender equality. Legislation to address the increasing violence against women within our society was also enacted. This trend continued as my Government adopted Caribbean Community (CARICOM) model legislation, and it was the first in the Caribbean to establish a family court. In addition, St. Vincent and the Grenadines joined with 16 other regional countries in implementing a training course in domestic violence intervention and prevention methodologies for the police and social workers. This bold step is being done in collaboration with our social partners.

My Government is committed to implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, so as to ensure that the human rights of women are preserved. Included in these rights is respect for the diversity of our people's indigenous women, women with disabilities and the continued access to education for pregnant adolescent and young mothers.

My Government has also embarked on programmes to address the needs of senior citizens, bearing in mind the needs of older women.

My Government recognizes the contribution of women to the development of our country and is committed to creating an enabling environment to encourage women to seek and win election to Parliament. This commitment has been demonstrated by the selection of a young professional woman to the House of Parliament as a Senator and as Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly. In addition, women continue to hold top managerial and administrative positions throughout the public and private sectors.

My Government is aware that, in order to change the stereotyping of women, the root causes must be addressed, and it has targeted education as a vehicle for change. The Government has also embarked on a textbook series review to address gender bias in the school curriculum, training in gender-based teaching strategies, and it has placed gender-sensitive guidance counsellors in schools. As a result, there is an increase in the number of girls doing non-traditional subjects at secondary school level. This is also true for boys. To further these efforts, my Government will participate in a regional programme for sex-disaggregated data on functional literacy, school attendance and subject selection.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines acknowledges the importance of the media in disseminating information on the Beijing Platform for Action. It is equally concerned that the status of women has been affected by negative portrayal in the media. The educational process will provide a new image of women, but we need cooperation and partnership with the media. Therefore, in our institutional mechanism, there is a media representative on the National Commission on Women.

My Government welcomes the review process, which is progressing to a successful completion. We have been taking concrete steps to ensure the elevation of women and have certainly learned from the best practices of other countries. We are encouraged to

pursue a process of continuing review as we implement the Platform for Action.

In closing, my Government acknowledges the contribution of civil society, women's organizations, the private sector, trade unions and other non-governmental organizations to the development of our country. We, therefore, recognize that it is very imperative to involve all sectors of society at the national level and to foster close cooperation with regional and international counterparts if we are to successfully implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Acting President: I wish once again to remind representatives of the necessity of remaining silent in the General Assembly hall. I also wish to repeat my appeal for brevity and urge delegations to limit their statements within the seven-minute time frame, as agreed by the decision of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: Now it is with great pleasure that I call on the head of the delegation of the Republic of Seychelles, Ms. Janick Bru, Director-General of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development, to address the Assembly.

Ms. Bru (Seychelles): The equality of men and women in Seychelles has been receiving the attention of the Government from the time that the Republic was established some 23 years ago. Seychellois women have always been recognized as essential partners in the development of the country.

In addressing gender-related matters, Seychelles took a somewhat different approach from most countries by straightaway adopting a mainstreamed approach. More than a decade ago, a National Gender Steering Committee, composed of individuals from Government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations, was established to promote and maintain gender equality and equity. Male representation on the Committee provided a collaborative atmosphere and ensured that the needs of both males and females were taken into consideration in the design of national development programmes.

Seychelles' constitutional charter of fundamental human rights and freedoms applies to all citizens, irrespective of gender. There are, however, specific regulations within the legislative framework that protect the civil and human rights of women. Some of these are, first of all, the right to pass on their nationality to their children born in Seychelles, even if the husband is a foreigner; secondly, the right to own property and to inherit; and, thirdly, the right to claim alimony from a defaulting partner — married or common-law.

In dealing with women and poverty, the Government of Seychelles recognized the role of a good education in empowering men and women towards achieving a reasonable standard of living. A policy of ten years compulsory and free education ensures that all boys and girls have the same access to education and career opportunities. School enrolment for children, which presently stands at 100 per cent, has guaranteed that all girls are given the essential foundation for making important life choices. Last year 46 per cent of scholarships for professional training went to women.

With the understanding that the human resource is the main wealth of the country, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development and the Ministry of Education work towards removing stereotypes through education, sensitization and career counselling for young people. Teaching materials have been investigated to remove stereotypes, and teachers have been systematically put through gender sensitization programmes.

Conscious of the importance of the health of citizens and the impact of health-care costs on the economy, the Government has taken steps to offer health-care services free at the point of service. Maternity health care is provided in all districts, and indicators show that prenatal care coverage is at 98 per cent.

Women also play a crucial role in national decision-making. Seychellois women were fully involved in the struggle for independence and are still politically active. Twenty-one per cent of the elected and nominated members of the National Assembly, and 25 per cent of the Cabinet of Ministers, are women. Recent survey figures show that at grass-roots levels, women are actually more active than men. Women constitute 60 per cent of local government counsellors.

We are presently giving much attention to the issue of domestic violence and violence against women. Concerted efforts in public sensitization and education have been most effective in replacing a tolerant and passive attitude with condemnation and a determination to break the recurring cycle. A national family tribunal, which was set up two years ago, is considered an important step in dealing with domestic violence and the rights of women and children.

Laws and policies have contributed to the advancement of women in Seychelles. However, stereotyping still exists; most women are still found in lower-paid jobs; and women still represent the majority of victims in domestic abuse. We believe that these problems can be traced to inherited and accepted cultural patterns of behaviour, which are often referred to as "norms", even though they are, if viewed objectively, abnormal: patterns which are known to be resistant to change, since they are often imbedded deep in the human psyche. Changing them will require time and continued and persistent effort.

It seems appropriate at this point to insert a few questions about the role of males in all this. What about their needs in this world of redefined gender roles? What should be done to prepare them to be supportive and receptive, not just benignly accepting and tolerant?

In conclusion, we note that it is imperative for societies to establish an environment that promotes the self-esteem, confidence and independence of the female half of the population. Fundamental to this are a legal framework which protects the human rights of all individuals equally and an educational system which contributes to the emancipation of all capable individuals. We believe that gender should not be treated as a separate national issue, but that it should be integrated in the whole system. Only in that way can women overcome the handicaps imposed by centuries of unequal treatment and boldly fulfil their human potential.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Rosleyn Tor, Director of Women's Affairs of Vanuatu.

Mrs. Tor (Vanuatu): My delegation and I bring greetings from the Government and the people of Vanuatu, a small nation in the South-West Pacific. Allow me to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his appointment as President of the General Assembly at this session and the Bureau for the efficient way in which they have been managing this important session throughout this week.

It is now five years since we met in Beijing and made our commitment with regard to the implementation of the 12 areas of concern to women and girls around the globe. We are meeting this week to discuss and deliberate on what we have accomplished and to share our experiences, hopes and aspirations. We are reaffirming our commitment to the principles and general framework for the achievement of equality, development and peace as contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Programmes of Action of Copenhagen, Cairo, Barbados and Rio.

Vanuatu's primary action after the Beijing Conference was to hold a meeting of governmental and non-governmental organizations to review and re-prioritize the Beijing Platform for Action according to our needs and resources and to translate it into simple English. It was then translated to Bislama, the lingua franca, so that the people could understand, and entitled "Working together for women".

The Human Poverty Index of Pacific island countries shows Vanuatu to be the third to last of the least developed countries. As such, Vanuatu believes that the key to development and success is education, but because of limited financial and human resources, education in Vanuatu is neither compulsory nor free. Since the Beijing Conference, the number of primary and secondary schools has increased, as has the number of children. However, of the total number of children in primary schools, less than a third find a place in the secondary school and even fewer continue to the tertiary level. Both the Government and non-governmental organizations have established vocational schools in the various provinces to cater for the needs of drop-outs, or what we call "push-outs", but most of these cater for males. Women need to be better educated and better informed so that they can get out of their current plight.

But given that there are 105 languages, excluding dialects, three official languages — English, French and Bislama — that the schools are scattered over some 80 islands, that financial, material and human resources are scarce and that communication is difficult, the need remains.

To address the issue of poverty and economic empowerment for women, in 1996 Vanuatu embarked on a microfinance scheme for disadvantaged women. The first 20 women took out their loans in February 1997, with a bank balance of zero. I am pleased to report that by May 2000, the membership had grown to 435 members, with savings of over $3,000. The demand for such schemes is high, but resources are few.

A successful nation is a healthy nation. Since the Beijing Conference in 1995, Vanuatu has made some progress in improving the health of women. Infant and

maternal mortality has decreased and life expectancy for women has risen. This has come as the result of cooperative efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, such as the Vanuatu Family Health Association, the Vanuatu National Council of Women, the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Vanuatu Society for the Disabled.

Vanuatu is fortunate that it is still free from the HIV/AIDS virus. But mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever and other diseases such as cervical and breast cancer need much work and financial and human resources if we are to eradicate them from the country.

Because of the rising incidence of domestic violence, in 1992 Vanuatu set up the Women's Centre, with the assistance of the Australian Women in Development Association, to cater for victims of domestic violence. It offers counselling, advice and temporary shelter to victims. It works closely with government departments, the police and the Fiji Crisis Centre to provide community education and training.

There has been a decrease in violence in the past three years, but more still needs to be done. In March 1995, Vanuatu ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A committee consisting of governmental and non-governmental organizations was set up to monitor its progress, and in 1998 a family protection bill was drafted. Among other things, the bill proposes to preserve and promote harmonious relationships, prevent domestic violence at all levels of society, ensure effective legal protection for victims of domestic violence and provide for the punishment of any or all persons who commit acts of domestic violence.

Though the draft bill has more publicity awareness workshops and consultations than any other in the history of Vanuatu, the question remains as to whether the 52 members of Parliament, all men, will pass it in the August 2000 parliamentary session.

Vanuatu has made some progress in having women in decision-making. We now have women in the posts of Auditor General, Public Prosecutor and Chief Registrar and in eight directorships. We have no women members of Parliament in the current Government, although we had one in the previous Government.

The Government embarked on the Comprehensive Reform Programme in June 1997. One of the major issues was gender equality in all spheres of life. Through the Programme, various mechanisms were set up to address this issue. The Department of Women's Affairs became an autonomous department under the portfolio of the Prime Minister. A Gender Planner and Equity Officer were appointed and a public service senior women's network was set up to find ways and means of addressing these imbalances. Non-governmental organizations have worked together with Government in lobbying various sectors of the community and the public sector at large to effect this change.

Women's rights are human rights. Chapter 5 of Vanuatu's Constitution provides for equal treatment under the law. However, the implementation is still far from satisfactory. Through the Government's Comprehensive Reform Programme, the Good Governance Project, the Vanuatu Women In Politics organization and the assistance of the University of the South Pacific, Port Vila centre, we have reviewed Vanuatu's legislation to ensure that it is entirely gender-based. The recommendations for amendments are laid before the authorities concerned.

Through the assistance of the Australian Government's overseas aid programme AusAID, Vanuatu has introduced a system in the Institut National Technique de Vanuatu, whereby girls may enter such non-traditional areas as mechanics, electronics, construction and carpentry. The project has still to be reviewed to ascertain its failure or success.

In conclusion, I would like to say this on behalf of the women of Vanuatu. The script was written and the stage set in 1946 for the play entitled *The Promotion of Women's Rights*. Fifty-four years later, we are still rehearsing our respective roles. It is now high time to get up on stage and perform the play. To do this, developing and underdeveloped countries look to the international community of developed nations to ensure that we all know our roles and responsibilities in the play.

Vanuatu women's theme is "Partnership for the New Millennium". We would like to extend it to all participants in this special session. Let us all continue to work together for the development of women towards a better standard of living, a better, healthier world and for gender equality, development and peace.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ravan Farhâdi, Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) (*spoke in French*): It is with bitter regret that I make this statement on behalf of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Unlike most other representatives who have spoken on behalf of their countries, I have no encouraging information on progress made in the advancement of women and in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 15 September 1995. The war imposed on the Afghan people by our neighbour to the south has in fact had a tragic impact on the civilian population, in particular on women and children.

We believe that world conferences offer Member States a gathering place where they can undertake joint initiatives to resolve their common problems. That is why we take this opportunity to explain to the Assembly, which has met in special session to discuss gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century, the problems of Afghan women and girls in that part of the territory of Afghanistan which is under the occupation of mercenaries known as the Taliban, who have been recruited and sent to my country by Inter-Services Intelligence, the Pakistani secret service agency.

Ever since the arrival of the Taliban in the territories which they and their extremist and obscurantist allies now occupy, women have been deprived of their right to work. Ever-deepening poverty prevails in a growing number of urban families, especially in Kabul, where, since September 1996, over 40,000 working widows have lost their employment, by which they earned the livings with which they supported their families.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Violence is rampant against women under the occupation of the Taliban extremist mercenaries. Widespread and systematic restrictions, tantamount to discrimination, have been imposed on women and girls in these areas through policies enacted by decree. These policies are implemented by the notorious so-called Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue. According to many witnesses, restrictions have been imposed against women through cruel, degrading and inhuman punishment. Some women have even been publicly beaten by Taliban guards for having left their homes without being accompanied by a male family member. Medical care is also restricted for women.

Another negative aspect of the occupation of Afghan territory by the Taliban mercenaries is the prohibition of education for women and girls. Dozens of elementary and high schools for girls have been closed by the Taliban. It should be noted that Afghanistan launched public education for girls in the 1920s. In 1937, the establishment of the first girls' high school in Kabul was followed by others. In the cities and semi-urban areas of Afghanistan, progress was being made in women's education, as in other Muslim countries throughout the world.

Armed conflict inflicts particular suffering on women and children. The current situation of women in Afghanistan clearly illustrates that fact. In the forced displacement of the Afghan population by the Taliban in July 1999, over two thirds of refugees were women and children. Displaced girls were victims of "marriages" forced upon them by the Taliban. Women were separated from the men of their own families. All of these barbaric acts perpetrated by the Taliban have been reported by human rights organizations, including Mr. Kamal Hossain, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan.

We are firmly convinced that the present crisis in Afghanistan, imposed by Pakistan for hegemonic purposes, should be condemned by the international community. Pakistan must end its support for and sending of extremist mercenaries who, for the most part, are from misogynist political groups that do not belong to the present and which do not follow the true tenets of the holy religion of Islam. Foreign military forces and the so-called volunteer fighters sent to Afghanistan by Pakistan must immediately leave Afghanistan. Afghans should be allowed to resolve their own problems by peaceful means under the auspices of the United Nations.

With a view to strengthening solidarity throughout the world with Afghan women, we appeal to the international community to put pressure on the Pakistani military junta to stop waging this expansionist war in Afghanistan. The Afghan people, like all peoples of the world, have a right to live in peace. The human rights of women and children can be respected only in a peaceful and secure situation.

Respect for human rights, including the rights of women and girls, should be an essential component of the peace agreement between the parties and must be part of any future arrangement.

I must point out that girls' schools and high schools are still open in the free zones in the north-east part of Afghanistan, areas that are administered by the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Since February 2000, there has been a women's association working for the advancement of the status of women, whose members are teachers in girls' schools.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that in order to ensure the advancement and the empowerment of women throughout the world, political will and the commitments undertaken are essential for gender equality, development and peace to become realities. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides a legal framework which can be used for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms. Lidija Topic.

Ms. Topic (Bosnia and Herzegovina): I join the previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Gurirab on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at this important session. It is my great honour to address this special session on behalf of my delegation.

As one of the countries participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the rest of the world community, expressed full commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Conference. Although my country was in the midst of conflict in September of 1995, today we can still assess gains made during the past five years.

Only a few months after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, the Dayton Peace Agreement was brokered. As was the common practice during the peace agreement negotiations, not a single woman participated on either side of the negotiation table.

It was only recently that we began to address the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, due to the end of the war and the post-conflict rebuilding of society. As the first step, the Beijing Declaration has been translated into the languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has enabled wider distribution and outreach of the document and its principles.

Today in Bosnia and Herzegovina women hold 29 per cent of the seats in the house of representatives, which places Bosnia and Herzegovina at the top of the scale regarding the participation of women in parliament. Here I recognize the positive role played by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in implementing the Rules of the Temporary Electoral Commission, which called for one third of the candidates nominated to be female and introduced the requirement that three of the first ten candidates on election lists have to be women. Only a few years earlier, in 1996 and 1997, women held 2 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, of the seats in the house of representatives. However, women are underrepresented at all other levels in government bodies.

In coordination with the OSCE Department for Democratization, women in parliaments have initiated the establishment of permanent commissions within the parliaments to manage the issues of the promotion of the status of women, implementation of the Platform for Action and the launching of the initiative for creating conditions for the establishment of government services. With all these goals in mind, the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has recently opened the Centre for Gender Equality.

Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina make up 40 per cent of the workforce. The unemployment rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina is high at 40 per cent, and 40 per cent of the unemployed are women.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina girls have the same access to education as boys. Slightly more male students enrol in university, but slightly more female students graduate from university.

Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have fed their families when there was no food. Women have taken their babies for vaccination when leaving the safety of their basement shelter was a mortal danger. Women have educated their children when they could not reach schools. Women from Srebrenica are still searching for approximately 10,000 missing fathers, brothers, husbands and other members of their families. Women stand as the true heroes of the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina — our grandmothers, mothers and

daughters; Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish and other nationalities.

Never again should rape as a weapon of war go unpunished. The International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia has recognized rape as a crime against humanity, and the Statute of the International Criminal Court has designated physical abuse of women a crime against humanity. The delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court played a unique and significant role in including, for the first time, gender-based crimes in the Statute.

The Council of Europe, in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Human Rights and other partners, organized a conference in Bosnia and Herzegovina entitled "Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation". The conference shed light on the scope of the placement of women and girls in appalling conditions of slavery and servitude.

We, the Governments, have to work together to identify and to protect victims. Rather than prosecuting the victims, we must instead prosecute the traffickers. We have to commit ourselves to undertaking all action necessary to combat that transnational crime and to understand the causes of trafficking such as economic impoverishment and disruption of social norms, both consequences of societies in transition. Bosnia and Herzegovina fully supports the work of the Ad Hoc Committee for preparation of the two protocols to the convention against transnational organized crime, hoping that these important instruments will soon be finalized.

Full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child, as an integral part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, must be encapsulated into gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development at all levels, that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women.

Tireless international efforts and the work of local non-governmental organizations to achieve gender equality have played a significant part in empowering women. In recent years the determination of civil society and of the non-governmental organization community in my country have helped to provide women with counselling, support and protection. A domestic violence information hotline has also been set up.

We believe that gender focus is more than just an ideological and moral issue. In our view, the common ground needed for progress is the promotion of the status of women in order to ensure full equality. This will also further enhance society as a whole, regardless of ethnicity, culture or religion.

The full realization of women's rights is not a gender issue but a human issue. Women and girl children represent the most vulnerable sector of society, and it must be our common objective to ensure an empowering environment based on full rights for all women.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Mary Note, Chairperson of the delegation of the Marshall Islands.

Mrs. Note (Marshall Islands): On behalf of my delegation, I wish to convey greetings from the President, the Government and the peoples of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender, equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". My delegation commends the organization of this special session.

In 1995, at the historic Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing, the Marshall Islands joined 187 other Member nations in adopting the Beijing Platform for Action for the advancement of women. The Conference recognized the numerous impediments to development facing women around the world and provided a sound basis for positive action for gender equality and for the social, economic and political empowerment of women worldwide.

The Conference highlighted critical areas and factors inhibiting women's empowerment. Areas of focus included poverty alleviation; equality in education; health care; gender-based violence; armed conflicts; limited access to economic resources; women's marginal role in power-sharing and decision-making; and persistent discrimination against, and violation of the human rights of, women and the girl child.

Five years later, women around the world still face many constraints, but we should never give up. We have much to gain from each other's experiences. Let us all move forward to further advance the Beijing + 5 agenda and to achieve the goals we all share, as called for by the Platform for Action. At the same time, let us

all celebrate those achievements we have registered thus far; the light at the end of the tunnel is much brighter. Indeed, we want a world in full compliance with Beijing+5.

As we begin the twenty-first century, our small island nation, along with all developing countries, is challenged by fragile economic and institutional structures which affect our lives and influence our actions. The inadequate representation of women in our Government, the paucity of employment opportunities for women, materialism and waste, alcoholism and abuse, the breakdown of the support structure from the extended family, and deteriorating traditional cultures and practices are among some of the other challenges facing us today.

The Marshall Islands recognizes the important role and potential of women as an integral part of the overall development of the country, and respect for their social status has long been embedded in the traditions, cultural thinking and life of the peaceful people of this country. The active and equal participation of women in national development has never been alien to the people or the Government, and yet it is felt that programmes aimed at providing women with opportunities for education, involvement in the political process and in productive economic activities, and developing their cultural awareness are still inadequate and limited. Furthermore, the national Government recognizes that the increased and active involvement of women in the economic, political and social life of the country is most desirable and advantageous to the entire nation.

In addition to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government is seriously considering, in the not-too-distant future, acceding to the other human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, among other international legal instruments.

As guaranteed under the Constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, women and men have equal rights to vote and to seek and hold public office. We are experiencing an increase in the interest of women seeking public office, as evidenced in our national and local elections. We are also seeing more women in higher-level posts in the public service sector, as well as entering the private sector.

The women of the Marshall Islands, in collaboration with our Government, non-governmental organizations, regional organizations, international organizations and United Nations agencies, are committed to mainstreaming gender issues. With the adoption of our National Women's Policy, women's groups are active partners in the sustainable development programmes in our country.

The Government has taken significant steps and measures to advance the status of women by formulating policies to involve women as equal partners at all levels, upgrading their skills and training to increase their employment opportunities, and to strengthen the coordination of women's activities. The formulation of the National Population and Development Policy; the National Youth Policy; the National Women's Policy; the Food, Nutrition and Agriculture Policy; and, finally, preparations for the revitalization and reorganization of the National Women's Council are all convincing indications of the Government's serious commitment to strengthen the role of women in nation-building and to protect their rights.

To seal our commitment for the development of Marshallese women, a National Women's Convention is scheduled for September 2000, at which women from all over the Marshall Islands will review the National Women's Policy and map our course of action in the twenty-first century. I would like to invite the international community to join us in our endeavour.

I would be remiss if I did not touch upon the essence of empowering women, and that is education. There is a well-known proverb which says,

> "If you educate a man, you educate a person, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family and, eventually, the whole world."

Indeed, without a sound population and a base of educated women in the population workforce structure, no society can liberate itself economically, politically or socially. The Marshall Islands highly values education, and women are fortunate to have equal access to education and training opportunities.

The promise of significant progress for women through the continued implementation of the Platform for Action can become a reality through genuine efforts by all stakeholders. This includes the commitment of new and additional resources from the international community, along with specific commitments by national and regional organizations and Governments.

It is therefore the hope and expectation of the Government of the Marshall Islands that the international community will pledge the necessary financial and technical resources necessary to implement the Platform for Action and the further initiatives resulting from this Conference.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the assistance and contribution accorded to the Marshall Islands by our international development partners towards the advancement of women. The Marshall Islands remains committed to the Platform for Action, is prepared to meet the challenges outlined by this session and anticipates progress towards equity, development and peace.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Palanitina Toelupe, Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Women's Affairs of Samoa.

Mrs. Toelupe (Samoa): I am indeed deeply honoured to address this gathering on behalf of the Government and people of Samoa on the occasion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

By the Charter of the United Nations Organization we the peoples of the United Nations once again reaffirm at this great gathering our faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women of all nations large and small.

Samoa is an independent, sovereign State in the Pacific region. Our culture is central to our way of life. Our people's bond with the land and sea is founded on our traditional values and strong Christian principles, which motivate and sustain us physically and spiritually.

Our Government believes that human rights and freedoms are best nurtured in the context of our culture and traditions. In this respect, the Constitution of Samoa, inspired by the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, represents a strong commitment to human rights and freedoms, with particular reference to equality of opportunity for all citizens, irrespective of gender.

The traditional *Fa'a-Samoa*, the Samoan way of life, recognizes the paramount value of every Samoan person, as he or she is an heir to a family chiefly title, land and the Samoan language.

The Government of Samoa's economic strategy statement for the period 2000 to 2001 emphasizes in its vision the essence of partnership for a prosperous society, hence acknowledging women as equal partners in every way. Women in Samoa have equal access to education and health services, employment opportunities, the protection of laws and to decision-making positions at all levels within the family, community and Government. There has always been recognition and support in Samoa of the multiple roles women perform in the home, community, church and their professions.

The establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs by an act of Parliament in 1990 demonstrates the high regard that the Government of Samoa has for its women and for their contribution to the development of Samoa economically, socially, politically and spiritually. Samoa is one of the few countries in the world that has a national holiday for women — the Monday after Mother's Sunday each year. This year marks the tenth anniversary since its inception.

The establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs was also an important milestone towards laying the foundation of ensuring equal opportunities for women and children in all areas of the Samoan society. This was further strengthened when Samoa ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in 1992, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1994.

In compliance with the commitments that Samoa has agreed to undertake by ratifying relevant regional agreements and international conventions, a national policy for the women of Samoa for the period 2000 to 2004 has been prepared and awaits approval by the cabinet. The vision of the national policy is clear: for all women of Samoa to be productive contributors to, as well as full beneficiaries of, national development for the attainment of quality of life for all. Its undertaking is distinct: to develop and enhance the capacity of the women of Samoa in all spheres in partnership with stakeholders, ensuring in particular that women are well informed of their human rights, as well as ways and means of accessing needed services and resources. We believe that it is important to reaffirm our basic human rights and well-being through our national policy for the women of Samoa.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs corporate plan for the period 2000 to 2003 identifies key areas in both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 1994 Pacific Platform for Action, to which the Government of Samoa has given priority for implementation in partnership with non-governmental organizations.

The advancement of women in Samoa has been facilitated by the work of many governmental and non-governmental organizations, in particular those that have been instrumental in advocating human rights in relation to violence against women and the rights of the child.

In 1995, the regional "Healthy Islands" declaration advocated the health promotion concept that promotes healthy settings where people live and congregate. In this connection, the "Healthy Islands" declaration further reaffirms the value given by the women of Samoa to healthy homes and healthy villages, and focuses on wellness as an asset. We believe that this is a fundamental entry point to both the success of women's advancement in all areas, as well as the practical translation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

We do not pretend to have fully implemented the critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action but, as we mentioned earlier, we have prioritized areas of concern in accordance with our country's realities. We believe that the emphasis that our Government has given to improving health and education in Samoa will further enhance the efforts of all women and men in translating the Beijing Platform for Action into expected outcomes.

While it is universally recognized that the average human being can only perform or accomplish so much, the ability of women to fulfil their roles as mothers, wives, caregivers, community developers and career women is an exceptional feat. Such extraordinary yet basic realities, however, are not always accorded due recognition and appreciation, as they are often overshadowed by issues surrounding the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Therefore, to all the women around the world we say: we celebrate your achievements to date. Your courage and commitments to the well-being of the people of the world is acknowledged with the utmost respect and admiration.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vinci Neil Clodumar, Chairman of the delegation of Nauru.

Mr. Clodumar (Nauru): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of SOPAC, the South Pacific Member States — Australia, Fiji, the Marshall Islands the Federated States of Micronesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country, Nauru — as well as on behalf of the observer States of the Pacific that are present at this meeting — Tuvalu and the Cook Islands.

Our Governments welcome this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the national commitments we made at Beijing.

The South Pacific region, and women in the region, face unique challenges in achieving the goals of Beijing. The particular economic and environmental vulnerability of the island nations in the region influence strategies for achieving gender equality, peace and development.

It is also a region of remarkable diversity of culture, history, language and geography. The challenges of responding to the needs of women and girls in diverse, dispersed and often isolated communities require innovative policies and programmes.

The health and education of women and girls are of particular importance for the Pacific. Within the region there has long been recognition of the connection between the health and well-being of women and the overall economic and social growth and development of countries. Improving women's participation in in-house promotion, access to quality health care and reproductive and sexual health services continues to be a priority area for action in the region. Of particular concern are continued high rates of non-communicable diseases, maternal deaths and related illnesses among women in most island countries. The basic health needs of women must be addressed if women are to contribute to their maximum potential at all levels, from the family to the region and beyond.

Since the Fourth World Conference for Women, held at Beijing, one of the most alarming and devastating new trends has been the global AIDS epidemic. Urgent strategies, including to enhance

international cooperation, must be adopted immediately to combat this growing epidemic. Education and recognition of the specific situation of women and girls must form an essential part of these strategies.

A key achievement in the implementation of the Platform has been the growing recognition that violence against women is both a health and a human rights issue. The problem of domestic violence is one that many countries from our region have taken steps to address, particularly through education and public awareness to change attitudes surrounding domestic violence. There are also a number of successful community-based official development assistance projects addressing domestic violence, including many where services are delivered by non-governmental organizations.

Men and women must be equal partners in contributing to and benefiting from sustainable people-centred development. The minimum requirement to achieve this is equal access to basic needs, resources, services, education and training, taking into account the diverse circumstances of women, such as those of women with disabilities.

The importance for all societies of the education of women and girls cannot be overstated. Education provides women with options and enables them to make choices. While the past five years have seen significant improvements in girls' access to formal education in the Pacific, the range of subjects of study available to girls remains limited. A particular challenge for the small island developing States of the Pacific is meeting the needs and aspirations of their young women as they seek further tertiary training and, eventually, employment.

The environmental vulnerability of small island developing States, as well as their contribution to global sustainability, makes women's involvement in this area particularly important. Further strategies must be adopted to ensure that women participate fully in policy and decision-making on matters relating to their environment. There is a chronic lack of access to new and emerging technologies in the Pacific, and this is felt even more acutely by women. Since Beijing, new technologies such as the Internet have been identified as potentially powerful tools for empowering women. The Internet provides a powerful tool for women entrepreneurs in isolated areas such as the Pacific, enabling them to access hitherto unattainable markets for their products. There are already examples of this, including the export of coconut oils and soaps produced by a group of women in Samoa. The entrepreneurial skills of Pacific women are a key resource for the region. In particular, strategies that provide women entrepreneurs with credit and support have been particularly successful and have highlighted the positive impact of the full participation of women in economic life across a range of communities, as well as enabling them to harness the benefits of globalization.

Since Beijing, increased attention has been paid to the impact of armed conflict on women and on girls. Conflict impedes progress towards full implementation of the Platform and places women and girls at particular risk of violations of their human rights. Increased participation of women and adherence to democratic principles are essential to conflict-resolution and to post-conflict reconstruction.

If we are to achieve our objective of gender equality, then we must put in place supportive domestic environments which protect the rights of women. Adherence to the principles of accountability, transparency and the rule of law promotes good governance when defining the interests of citizens and groups in society, including women. Effective and targeted development assistance can support the development of the strong institutional frameworks necessary for good governance. Respect for democratic institutions is a value shared by the countries in our group and lies at the heart of this.

Since 1995, the Platform has been used by countries in the Pacific to guide national action towards empowering women and achieving their equality. Many countries have produced national action plans and have developed national machineries for women, including the establishment of government ministries dealing with women's affairs. The countries of the region recognize the need for cooperation at the regional level to assist Governments to implement and monitor the Platform and their respective national action plans.

Gender mainstreaming has been an effective strategy for Pacific island countries in making progress since Beijing, and it must be supported. Further capacity-building at all levels, including in partnership with non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies working in the region, is essential for implementing the Platform. In measuring progress for

women in the region, the need for assistance and technical cooperation has been particularly highlighted. Sex-disaggregated data across all areas of society must be collected to ensure that policies and programmes are designed to address the specific needs of women within their families and their communities.

Finally, our Governments also wish to acknowledge the significant contribution of non-governmental organizations as partners in the implementation of the Platform. This spirit of partnership and teamwork, and our support for their participation in this review process, is evidenced by the significant number of non-governmental members on South Pacific delegations to this special session.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Kathryn Hauwa Hoomkwap, representative of the observer delegation of the Holy See.

Mrs. Hoomkwap (Holy See): The Holy See delegation has participated actively in the negotiations leading to this special session of the General Assembly, a session which has raised issues of critical importance to the lives of millions of women worldwide, and which has been evaluating the progress that has been made since the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The living heart of the initiatives called for in the Beijing Platform for Action corresponds to the multiplicity of services the Catholic Church has historically provided to women, demonstrating in action as well as in words its belief in the importance of educating girls and women and of access for women to education and the basic social services which they need to pursue their own lives and family goals. The Platform's sections on the needs of women in poverty, on ending violence against women and on education, employment, land, capital and technology coincide with the Church's own mission, since they begin to speak of the hope which Pope John Paul II has eloquently summed up in his exhortation to "be not afraid".

But, Mr. Acting President, the truth is that I am afraid, as are many of my sisters throughout the world. As a wife and mother, I, and my delegation, fear for the health and well-being of children in Africa, where the continued prevalence of diseases like malaria, guinea worm diseases, schistosomiasis, along with the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic, fells so many of our children. We worry about the number of people, especially the children, who suffer from malnutrition in a world with so much food.

The Holy See is extremely concerned about the growing conflicts and the people who find themselves torn from their homes and families by war and senseless turmoil. As a mother of children, I and my delegation, are greatly worried about those who cannot read or write and who continue to be enslaved by ignorance and a lack of knowledge in a world that seems to thrive on technology and information.

For these reasons, my delegation strongly supports the document's provisions condemning all forms of violence against women, upholding women's rights to economic and political empowerment, its measures against poverty, and its references — brief though they are — to high mortality rates among girls and women, due both to chronic illness and to widespread infections, including tropical diseases. My delegation is particularly pleased to see in the final document a clear acknowledgement of the need of all women for access to basic social services, including education, clean water, adequate nutrition and safe sanitation.

However, in the end, the "Women 2000" document, like the Beijing Platform, would emphasize, seemingly endlessly, one issue — sexual and reproductive health — to the detriment of a holistic view of the health of women and their families, which is so desperately needed to alleviate women's fears.

This special session has given us an opportunity, not only to evaluate the past, but also to plan for the future; and my delegation and I must ask if we have accomplished all that we set out to do. We live in a changing world in which many people are afraid and in which many people have lost hope. The international community must work intensely to calm those fears through the effective actions of the United Nations. For all of us to cease to be afraid, we must proceed with full and complete human development — not only social and economic, but also spiritual.

The Holy See renews its pledge to help find an end to hunger, to find a way towards educational opportunities for all, towards remedy and comfort for the suffering caused by sickness and disease, and through these means to continually seek to extinguish the fear that keeps us from celebrating life as the gift that it is.

"Be not afraid" is not an empty phrase; it is a message that needs to be concretized by doing all that we can to lead every woman and her family to the threshold of hope.

In conclusion, the Holy See delegation wishes to state that nothing that the Holy See has done in the "Women 2000" process should be understood as an endorsement of concepts it does not support for moral reasons. Nothing is to be understood to imply that the Holy See endorses abortion or has in any way changed its moral position concerning abortion or contraceptives. The Holy See reaffirms its belief that life begins at conception and that every human life must be protected from the earliest moments to the end of the life cycle.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Patricia Schulz, Head of the Federal Office for Equality Between Women and Men of Switzerland.

Mrs. Schulz (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): It is with very mixed feelings that I take the floor at nearly the end of this session. Sadness, perplexity, joy and hope are all mixed up within me. We have had an opportunity in this Beijing+5 process; have we succeeded in grasping it or have we wasted it?

I will speak first about the sadness. Five years after Beijing, some of the key points are still being disputed, specifically everything concerning the right of women to make autonomous decisions and respect for their human rights. We have had a hard time here to find the necessary compromises. We have not always succeeded; nor have we always understood each other. In spite of the decisions made before the special session, there have been attempts to re-open the Platform for Action and to go backwards with respect to our commitments made in Beijing. Yet, the old problems remain and new ones have appeared that require all of us to work harder. Women still do not enjoy full respect of their human rights. Violence in all of its forms reveals itself in the banality and the horror of domestic violence, as well as in the banality and the horror of the violence of trafficking in human beings or in the banality and horror of conflicts that are tearing apart so many regions. HIV/AIDS is striking all the continents and is particularly ravaging the young population of Africa, destroying its future.

Globalization and new technology present opportunities and risks. Unfortunately, we have not yet found the means of minimizing the risks and ensuring that women profit more from the opportunities offered — all women, not just a privileged minority in countries of the North. Poverty all too often reflects a feminine visage, and the strategies for fighting it are not enough by a long shot. Everywhere, women are participating too little in decision-making; their absence or their under-representation in all places of power implies that their needs and interests are not sufficiently taken into account or that they are not taken into account at all. The institutional machinery responsible for upholding the achievement of equality, when they exist at all, continues generally to lack the necessary resources to accomplish their enormous tasks.

I now turn to my second point, that of perplexity. I am perplexed by the considerable efforts that have been invested in the Beijing+5 process and by the answers received. Has it been worth the effort? At Beijing, we adopted a demanding and visionary Platform for Action. Are we completing it sufficiently with the two new documents that we are negotiating here? Are they sufficient, above all, with respect to the actions to be taken, especially actions dealing with current challenges affecting the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action? For us, it was clear that we could not accept anything less than what we agreed upon in Beijing. We achieved the minimum, but what about all the other issues and those attempts of so many non-governmental organizations that followed our work?

We must await the complete document in order to judge it completely. What we already know is that we have achieved progress in the area of health, violence, globalization, economic affairs, human rights and political participation. These are areas where we have made progress. The question now is to find out if we have done an adequate job.

Following these questions, I would now like to talk about joy; joy, despite the tension and frustration which have marked many hours spent in this building. We have learned from statements made in the General Assembly and on parallel activities, and especially in meetings and discussion held during negotiations, everything that has been done over the past five years. In one State or region emphasis was placed on the fight against violence, elsewhere on the education of girls and women and finally somewhere else on participation in politics and professional life. Of

course, it is never enough, but it is what we have done and what we share.

This sharing has also made it possible for us to search and often find compromise solutions that go beyond the limits of traditional negotiation groups. The United Nations, this irreplaceable universal forum, has made this vital sharing possible for us, regardless of the difficulties of negotiation.

Now I come to the fourth point; I would like to finish with hope. We are all going to leave to return to our countries, our organizations and our institutions. We will each find ourselves with our own realities, but we will not be isolated. We have shared a common experience. We have contacts and networks. We can benefit from the various experiences of different people. We can access common information.

We have names and faces, and above all, we have reaffirmed our common commitment made at Beijing and we have developed it. We know that commitment to gender equity is a pivotal point for all commitment to social justice and for the fight for peace and against poverty. This commitment remains and will always be difficult. It demands patient work, which is often thankless and invisible.

It is clear that we cannot accomplish this work successfully without cooperating closely with the non-governmental organizations. They too have their networks, their names and their faces and they are using new technologies to become increasingly efficient. They accomplish their activities and programmes and they never cease to remind us, Governments, of our responsibilities to be faithful to the commitments we have undertaken. We wish to thank non-governmental organizations for their tireless commitment and their courage.

May the Declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted at Beijing, together with the Political Declaration and Outcome Document we have just completed, provide all of us with inspiration in the coming years. We know that a real policy of equality cannot be improvised. It requires precise skills and instruments to guide that policy and to measure whether the actions taken have been successful. Above all, it requires a clear political will to be able to turn words into actions. It is our hope, but, above all, it is our responsibility to achieve this.

The Acting President: I call on Ms. Munokoa, Minister for Internal Affairs and Public Works, Energy and Physical Planning of the Cook Islands.

Ms. Munokoa (Cook Islands): I bring greetings on behalf of the Government and the people of the Cook Islands. We have prepared a formal paper on the Cook Islands situation regarding matters before this special session of the General Assembly. Given the time constraints, however, I would like to speak very briefly to the paper.

As in many other countries attending this session, women in the Cook Islands traditionally played a role focusing on child-raising and domestic duties. Gradually, however, it came to be recognized that women were capable as well of making a broader contribution to the development of the country. They also had a right to do so.

In fact, since approval of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies in 1985 and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 in particular, the status of women in the Cook Islands in all the critical areas identified by the Strategy and Platform for Action has improved considerably.

In 1995 the Cook Islands adopted its first National Policy on Women. That Policy clearly recognized:

> "... that women are an integral part of our nation. Their involvement in community and national development is most important. They must never be just passive observers. It is only proper that women should be equal partners with men in the development process of the Cook Islands."

In these few minutes, I would like to concentrate on four areas in which progress has been noteworthy.

First, regarding women and the environment, women have played a leading role in the protection of our fragile and vulnerable ecosystem in their push for the use of traditional marine conservation reserves known as the "raui" to contribute to an increase in the numbers of fish and shellfish available for present and future generations. These conservation reserves are not legislated, but are community-based and managed on the basis of trust and responsibility.

Secondly, regarding violence against women, progress has been made with regard to the establishment of mechanisms of cooperation between

Government and non-governmental organizations. Government agencies have come to recognize that this is not a domestic problem that should be swept under the carpet to be sorted out between individual parties. Rather, it is a community problem. With the assistance of donor Governments, training of judiciary, health and police officials in appropriate ways to deal with this problem has been possible. The provision of victim support and assistance is also now readily available. Government is currently reviewing legislation related to sexual crimes.

Thirdly, regarding women in power and decision-making, we have recently seen the election for the first time of two women to our 25-member Parliament and 9 women to local government. Four women have also been appointed to head important government agencies and ministries.

Fourthly, with regard to women and the economy, since strict economic reforms were made in 1996, statistics collected indicate that exactly 50 per cent of small businesses started up with government assistance were done so by women. For the period from January to December 1999, total funds accessed by small businesses owned by women amounted to 77.8 per cent. This figure includes applications to commercial banks and international funding agencies and schemes.

In trying to highlight the positive areas, we are ever mindful that much work still needs to be done in these and other areas, which include further support services, training and capacity-building for government officials and civil society to address the issue of violence against women, and domestic implementing legislation and training concerning the various agreements relating to women to which my Government is a party.

Progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has been made possible by a close working partnership between Government and civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations.

To conclude, my Government would like to reiterate its support for the strategy and Platform for Action and will renew its commitment to meeting its obligations. I would also like to lend our support to issues of concern to the Pacific Island countries, namely, the cessation of nuclear testing and the banning of hazardous wastes from our region.

We would like this session to do two things: first, acknowledge the hard work done by us all to meet the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action; and secondly, call for renewed commitment from everyone here — the international and regional organizations, Governments and non-governmental organizations — to continuing to work towards achieving gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century. The Cook Islands Government looks forward to working closely with other members of the international community during and following this special session. May peace be upon us all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Alimata Salambéré, Chargée de mission for the Advancement of Women of the International Organization of la Francophonie.

Mrs. Salambéré (International Organization of la Francophonie) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to express the emotion and pride I feel speaking on behalf of the International Organization of la Francophonie and especially on behalf of its Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose personal commitment to what could be called the "Beijing process" is well known to all.

I should also like to extend our most sincere congratulations to the representative of Namibia and to all previous speakers and to express our hope for the success of this work.

From our perspective, the Beijing process has followed a dual approach for many years. As has been observed, it is continuing to evolve, I am pleased to say. Let us recall the major world conferences that mobilized States in the previous decade and in which La Francophonie, which was present at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio, took an active part. It will be noted above all that the topics of these conferences were highly complementary to one another, be it human rights at Vienna; population at Cairo; social development at Copenhagen; women, of course, at Beijing; or human settlements at Istanbul.

It should also be emphasized that this dynamic was to address at the global level all the great issues of interest to the human species in their most diverse components so as to call us to action on the future of humanity in the twenty-first century. It was easy to note at each occasion not only the interdependence of the problems and areas considered, but also and above

all the role and place of women throughout these issues.

In this context, I should like to recall here that the first Francophonie Women's Conference, held in Luxembourg last February, was devoted to the theme "Women, power and development". We felt these two axes to be not only fundamental, but also matters of priority with regard to the 12 critical areas identified at Beijing. The host country of the meeting, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, has submitted as an official document of this special session the Declaration adopted on that occasion by our 55 member and associated States and Governments.

The Declaration invites the International Organization of la Francophonie, especially the Intergovernmental Francophone Agency and the organizers of summits, along with all member States and Governments, to enhance their action in two areas involving, first, women in decision-making and institutional mechanisms to promote the status of women and, secondly, the participation of women in development with a view to improving their socio-economic status in the context of sustainable development. To that end, it reaffirms that peace is an integral aspect of development.

I would briefly recall here that our community, representing more than one in four countries of the world and almost one third of the States Members of the United Nations is represented on every continent. With great respect for their identity, it unites countries that are very diverse but all equally dedicated, through their common language, to the promotion of peace, justice, security, solidarity, democracy and respect for universal and inalienable human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I take this opportunity also to emphasize that the Secretary-General of our organization, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, is eager to ensure that the voice of la Francophonie be raised as one with that of the international community and to make common cause with all efforts being made to support peace and the peaceful settlement of disputes throughout the world, and especially on the African continent, which is home to many of our member States and is still deeply torn by numerous bloody conflicts.

A moment ago, I referred to the dual approach of international meetings, including the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing. This leads me now to take stock of and outline approaches better suited to implementing its Programme for Action. The second approach is, of course, that of the major conferences devoted to women. I would say that today, in a way, we are celebrating Mexico City + 25.

A quarter of a century, of course, has not been enough to smooth away all the problems, given their deep roots in human nature. Discrimination against women, the effects of which are felt at various levels and in various sectors throughout the world, underlies the third and final theme of this special session, after development and peace: that of gender equality. Nearly 10 years ago in Vienna, we affirmed that

> "the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights". (*Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, para. 18*)

Secretary-General Kofi Annan reiterated this point in his opening statement to this special session.

Last October, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that strengthened the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by giving it an Optional Protocol. On behalf of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, I wish to stress the value we attach to this step. I would also recall that it was precisely in this spirit that the eighth Summit of la Francophonie, which was held in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada, in September 1999 — and which the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, honoured with his presence — requested Mr. Boutros-Ghali to endeavour, together with the relevant international organizations, to draft a report on the status of the ratification of major international legal instruments and their implementation.

This, then, is the commitment of the francophone community in response to the objectives of the current special session: "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". As I mentioned earlier, this commitment was defined in particular in the Luxembourg Declaration. This new century, however, offers us new challenges as modernity asserts itself more strongly every day.

That is why, in spite of the many difficulties that continue to hinder women in their efforts to achieve equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century, we should, in order to continue our efforts,

mobilize to an even greater extent through a dynamic act of solidarity that would create networks of concrete and effective partnerships.

Moreover, as was stated in Luxembourg, if we wish truly to change mindsets and to make equality a reality, it is essential to create conditions that will enable women and men both to become involved and contribute together to achieving these goals. This earnest aspiration was expressed by the Minister for the Advancement of Women in Luxembourg in his statement here last March.

Women, as it has been emphasized here, are harshly stricken by poverty, and above all by the growing impoverishment of all of our countries, both in the North, which has suffered from recession and unemployment, and in the South, which has not yet accrued all of the benefits of industrialization. However, the world we live in, this twenty-first century which we are entering, should not become a uniform one. Today, as is urged by the Secretary-General of La Francophonie, it is clear that the only viable solution is respect for our differences. La Francophonie, which values solidarity, wishes to be a community with a pluralistic nature, and it is this element which is crucial for women. Depending on circumstances, being different can be either a strength or a weakness. It is up to women themselves to make it a strength, so that women might, in dignity and in tolerance, attain to all levels of decision-making. Once they are a majority, they will then have to stop behaving like a minority.

May I in conclusion quote from the words of a well-known African specialist and ethnologist:

> "We should not forget that a new civilization does not really penetrate society unless it is assimilated by women. They are the guardians of tradition. But it is through them that a new era will dawn in society which will change person-to-person relations to the benefit of all individuals."

The Acting President: I now call on Mrs. Valencia Mogegeh, Head of Gender Affairs of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Mrs. Mogegeh (Commonwealth Secretariat): I wish to express my gratitude for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and I wish also to bring warm greetings from the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the Right Honourable Mr. Donald McKinnon, who has not been able to attend this important forum.

Much progress has been made in achieving gender equality between women and men since the United Nations Decade for Women — 1976 to 1985 — when the issue was first put on the agenda of global governance institutions such as the Commonwealth Secretariat. However, gender inequalities persist in Commonwealth countries, as they do globally. Some of this can be attributed to unequal power relations between women and men, which are deeply embedded in cultural values and attitudes, religious beliefs and practices, social norms, economic activities, development planning in all sectors, and political life as well as public institutions.

The Commonwealth remains committed to its endorsement and support of the Beijing Platform for Action and this Beijing+5 review process. The Commonwealth therefore hopes that the newly formulated update to the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, which will serve to guide the work of the association from 2000 to 2005, will contribute to strengthening the global agenda for gender equality, development and peace into the twenty-first century.

Within the framework of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action, the update to the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action prioritizes four major areas for action based on the fundamental values and principles of the Commonwealth. These areas are: gender mainstreaming through the Gender Mainstreaming System; the integration of gender into national budgets, macroeconomic policies and globalization processes; the promotion of women's rights as human rights, using an integrated approach to combating violence against women, and including the impact of HIV/AIDS on women; and efforts to increase women's participation in political and public policy agenda-setting, as well as in processes of peace-building, conflict mediation and resolution.

Secondly, the update addresses persisting gender inequalities in areas such as poverty alleviation and violence against women, and critical emerging gender issues in areas such as globalization and trade, armed conflicts and peace processes.

It also targets the strengthening of national women's machinery by providing responsive policy advice; developing innovative methodologies, tools and

publications, such as an interactive gender and development web site which includes a joint United Nations/Commonwealth database on training; and promoting mutual learning through the sharing of best practices.

Lastly, the update promotes a synergistic approach that should strengthen partnerships, promote the pooling of resources and enhance the achievement of intended targets.

In conclusion, allow me to point out that the update to the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action, which spans the period leading up to the next United Nations global conference on women — if we can go by history — represents the commitment of Commonwealth heads of Government and Ministers responsible for women's affairs to continue Commonwealth and global efforts for achieving gender equality. At the request of Commonwealth Ministers responsible for women's affairs, Commonwealth heads of Government, meeting in Durban, South Africa, in 1999, proposed that this update be seen as a Commonwealth contribution to strengthening the Beijing+5 review process.

It is in this context that, on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Right Honourable Mr. Donald McKinnon, I present the update to the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (2000-2005) to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Jacques Forster, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Forster (International Committee of the Red Cross): To open this statement, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would like to give a voice to a woman victim of armed conflict:

> "War is destruction; our children are lost, our husbands gone; we have nothing; our houses destroyed — what more can I describe?"

What more need she describe indeed? It is not even necessary to tell you where this woman is from — it could be any of a multitude of countries at war around the world. In fact, it was one of a host of war-affected countries surveyed by the ICRC in 1999 as part of a worldwide "People on War" project, where men and women, civilians and combatants, were given a chance to speak for themselves about the limits in war.

The impact of conflict on women takes many forms, some more apparent than others. One of the most torturous consequences of armed conflict for many women is the issue of missing relatives. Thousands of women are searching for news of the fate of their relatives — generally male — who are missing. The inability to mourn and bury loved ones has an enormous impact on the survivors of war and the coping mechanisms they are able to adopt. The search for missing relatives often drags on long after the end of an armed conflict and can be a lasting impediment to the process of reconciliation. Humanitarian law recognizes the need and the right of families to obtain information regarding the fate of their missing relatives, and the ICRC urges all parties to armed conflicts to clarify the fate of missing people and to inform their families accordingly.

Women are less often combatants than men and are less often detained for reasons related to armed conflict. However, when they are detained, their conditions may be worse than those of men. Therefore, throughout its visits to places of detention, the ICRC pays special attention to the needs of women and children.

Furthermore, women more often flee into displacement due to fighting and are more often the victims of sexual violence. Sexual violence is a particularly heinous violation of international humanitarian law. In the ICRC survey previously mentioned, one in nine of all respondents reported that they knew someone who was raped, and nearly as many said the same for sexual assault. This is intolerable. Parties to an armed conflict have a duty to ensure protection and respect for all civilians and persons no longer taking part in the hostilities. This duty must become the reality.

Women are frequently widowed and find themselves forced to take on new and unaccustomed roles — for example, as heads of households. Throughout the world women are continuing to respond to war with remarkable courage, resourcefulness and resilience, confronting the effects of war and the obstacles it imposes on their ability to sustain and protect themselves and their families.

In order to assist in the best possible way, the international community needs to understand the realities confronting all persons not taking part in hostilities, including, of course, women. Two years ago the ICRC initiated a study to examine how women are affected by armed conflict around the world and how the ICRC's activities are responding to the needs engendered by armed conflict. Some of the findings of this research have already led to a renewal of ICRC activities. This study, which will conclude this year, will form the background for the formulation of guidelines for the protection and assistance of women and girl children in armed conflict. This ICRC initiative was introduced at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies held in November 1999 at Geneva. Furthermore, during the Conference the ICRC President renewed the institution's commitment to the effective protection of women through a four-year pledge. This pledge focuses especially on dissemination to parties to an armed conflict of the protection accorded by humanitarian law to women and girls on the issue of sexual violence.

From its inception, international humanitarian law has accorded women general protection equal to that afforded men. At the same time, humanitarian law treaties accord women special protection according to their specific needs. Both that general and special protection are enshrined in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977. The ICRC acknowledges as a positive development the fact that the ad hoc Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, and the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, consider sexual violence a war crime. The ICRC welcomed the opportunity to present a working paper on the elements of crimes, including that of sexual violence, to the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court.

The President took the Chair.

The ICRC hopes that its recent initiatives will lead to a better understanding of the impact of war on women and to a more effective implementation of the protection conferred upon women by international humanitarian law. This ICRC statement started with the voice of a woman victim — a woman survivor of war — asking what more she could describe. To speak on her behalf, one thing that would have helped her and tens of thousands of others is clear. If international humanitarian law was respected, much of the suffering, loss and destruction that civilians and those *hors de combat* experience every day could be reduced. The prime responsibility for observing the rules of war rests with the parties to an armed conflict. The ICRC appeals today for genuine measures of implementation of humanitarian law by States so as to guarantee the protection of women.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Anna Diamantopolou, European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Community, who will speak on behalf of the European Commission.

Ms. Diamantopolou (European Community): Over the last few days, we have seen a renewal of the commitments that were made five years ago in Beijing. The European Community welcomes this reaffirmation of the goals set out in the Platform for Action. We strongly support the three principles that underlie the Platform for Action: the recognition that women's rights are human rights, the empowerment of women and the gender mainstreaming approach. The point now is to act. The real value of this special session derives from the discussion and formulation of policies, strategies and practical measures that will bring us closer to gender equality.

The struggle for equality is an ongoing one, requiring a sustained political effort over a period of decades. That is why gender equality has now been enshrined in the Treaty on European Union as a fundamental goal. The European Union experienced both a deepening and further integration that has been guided by the principles of democracy. Today we are preparing for enlargement. The effects have been positive. The deepening of the Union has fostered the exchange of good practices between the member States, and the partnership between the States and civil society. Our past equality programmes have helped develop these good practices and exchanges. Moreover, a wide body of legislation firmly established gender equality and rights as key principles of our democracy. Gender equality is integrated in the Community's development cooperation and human rights policies.

The European Commission just a few days ago reaffirmed its political commitment by adopting a new framework strategy for gender equality, with implications for every area of Commission policy. It

also put forward a programme specifically designed to support gender mainstreaming.

The European Community's activities extend well beyond the member States of the European Union. There are strong links around the globe through trade and development cooperation policies. All regions, Europe included, are feeling the positive and negative effects of globalization. The new technologies, the new economy and the new kind of exclusion — e-exclusion — demand new policies and new cooperation at the global level. The changing world, as well as our response to it has an effect on gender equality.

Listening to the proceedings over the past few days, I have noticed that these changes contain a paradox. The past decade has seen astonishing advances in science and technology, in health services and in information-processing and communications technology. These developments offer an enormous potential for improving the quality of our lives. In short, these trends hold out a vision of a truly modern, prosperous and civilized society. The paradox is that, at the onset of the twenty-first century, millions of women around the globe, including in the European Union, are still trapped in situations that would have been all too familiar 200 years ago. A whole generation of women is currently deprived of the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights, suffering indignities resulting from fundamentalist misogyny as practised by the Taliban — and not only by them.

Moreover, women and girls continue to be the object of trafficking. The number of women thus brought into the European Union has grown over the past 10 years. Paradoxically, trafficking takes extensive advantage of new communication technologies that are considered to be the cornerstone of modernity.

Much of the responsibility for addressing and redressing the old and new forms of discrimination lies with the political will of Governments and regional and international institutions. The fundamental question asked here is what more they can do. This brings me to the issue of good governance. Good governance, as exercised by national and international bodies, means more than good policies; it is about the relationship between Governments and their citizens, and about how government structures affect that relationship.

Equal representation is a key issue here. The participation of women in political and civil life is fundamental to good governance. Institution-building to meet the challenges of globalization should be defined by the equal and shared participation of women in all political processes. The European Community is prepared to assist the States members of the European Union to fulfil their commitments in this regard.

Over the past few days, questions have been raised about the usefulness of the "+5" process of evaluation. I think we can agree that a sound review process based upon measurable goals constitutes a strong incentive and a way forward for women's empowerment. However, three conditions must be met: we must never go below the previously agreed goals; we must focus our energies on supporting the empowerment of the women who suffer most; and we must ensure that the next generation can reap the benefits of globalization.

This special session must be considered a milestone by national and international decision-makers and institutions on the way towards realizing gender equality by placing it at the heart of democracy and sustainable development. I truly hope and wish that, at the end of the day, we can achieve this.

The President: I give the floor to Mrs. Ólöf Ólafsdóttir, Secretary of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men of the Council of Europe.

Mrs. Ólafsdóttir (Council of Europe): It is an honour and a privilege for me to represent the Council of Europe at this special session of the General Assembly. Five years after the Beijing Conference, we need to take stock of the progress made and propose action to help us move forward. There is still much to do, and it would be easy to lose what has been gained.

The principles contained in the Platform for Action need to be reaffirmed again and again; they must be respected, promoted and, most of all, fully implemented. Our task in the twenty-first century is to ensure that women can at last exercise fully the rights they won throughout the twentieth century, which has now come to a close. In a nutshell, gender equality means equal visibility, equal empowerment and equal participation by both sexes in public and private life.

To reach that goal, women must enter the decision-making process at all levels and in significant numbers. This will not happen by itself. It requires strong political will and action on the part of those with

the power to speed up the process. Some countries have made welcome progress in this field since Beijing, and their example should be followed. Women are tired of waiting. It is time to act.

The Council of Europe has long been actively engaged in the promotion of gender equality and the protection of women's human rights. Progress has been made in the legal field. In particular, the European Social Charter has been revised; it now includes a specific provision on the right to dignity at work. That provision covers the prevention of sexual harassment, as well as protection from that type of behaviour. Since 1998, the control mechanism set up under the Social Charter has included a major innovation: a protocol providing for a system of collective petitions. Applications have already been received and examined. If non-governmental organizations defending women's rights have recourse to this protocol, it will provide a much more effective protection for women's human rights.

It is important to make all human rights instruments more workable for women. This year we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. A draft additional protocol has been prepared to introduce a general prohibition of discrimination, above and beyond the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention. It is hoped that the draft protocol will be adopted within the next few months.

I am happy to announce that three weeks ago the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation to member States on combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The adoption of that text was most timely. Europe has seen a recent intensification of this modern form of slavery, which is a major violation of human rights that has become a highly profitable criminal trade continent-wide and worldwide. The adoption of that recommendation will initially be followed up by a seminar to be held at the end of this month in Athens for countries of South-east Europe, which are particularly affected by this trade.

Other legal instruments on the protection of women and girls against violence and on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making are being prepared.

Since the Beijing Conference, the Council of Europe has put special focus on combating violence against women in all its forms, as a crime and as a violation of human rights. The need for men to take responsibility for their violence against women has received specific attention.

Another main feature of our work since Beijing has been the efforts to develop instruments to facilitate the implementation of gender equality policies. In 1998 a report on the methodology and practice of gender mainstreaming was published. It has since become a reference document all over Europe. Last month a similar report on positive action was published. It explains how positive action interrelates with the principle of non-discrimination and how it interacts with gender mainstreaming. In addition, the Council of Europe has worked extensively on the right to free choice in matters of sexuality and reproduction and on the human rights of immigrant and ethnic minority women.

When looking to the future, how can we ensure that progress is made? There must be a constant concern to protect and promote women's human rights, to protect women against all forms of violence and to ensure that women participate fully in all decision-making bodies, not least in those that deal with peace-making and peace-building. Women are too often victims in wars and too rarely — almost never — involved in the peace negotiations.

As to strategies, gender mainstreaming is a major strategy to promote equality. If properly implemented, it will be instrumental in the reorganization of all policy processes, and it will integrate men more effectively into the equality debate. It will also make it easier to take into account the situations, needs and interests of diverse groups of women.

More than ever, real progress in gender equality will depend on cooperation, on networking and on exchanges of good practice. As in the past, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations will have a primordial role to play. It is within such a framework that it is possible to act together in a dialogue, share information and experience and provide assistance when needed.

In October the Council of Europe will organize, as it does every year, a forum on equality policies in one of its new member States. This autumn it will be in Bratislava, Slovakia, on the theme "Human rights of girls and young women in Europe: questions and challenges for the twenty-first century". Non-

governmental organizations will as usual participate in this forum.

I conclude by expressing the hope that the twenty-first century will, through the realization of gender equality, offer new generations of women and men more social justice, less poverty, better societies and a better life, based on mutual respect and partnership and on the full enjoyment of human rights for all. It is not complicated. It is not difficult. It is, first and foremost, a matter of political will and a matter of courage.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mokhtar Lamani, Chairman of the observer delegation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Lamani (Organization of the Islamic Conference) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of this special session of the Assembly. I am certain that your wisdom and experience will contribute greatly and effectively to the success of this sessions' work.

The Islamic summit conference held in Tehran in 1997 decided to establish a working group consisting of certain members to coordinate questions and issues relating to women. Convinced of the distinctive role of women in development, the group has held a number of meetings at the margins of the session and has decided on this statement to be made on behalf of the Islamic Group. The Chairman of the Burkina Faso delegation, as she has said, has entrusted me with making the following statement:

(*spoke in English*)

> "I speak on behalf of the Islamic Group at the United Nations, which comprises 56 member States and four observer States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), spread across all geographical regions of the world, representing about 1.4 billion people of diverse ethnicities, languages and cultures.
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> "Islam, the great heavenly religion which was revealed to mankind about 14 centuries ago, promotes peace, tolerance and cooperation among all human beings. It accords human dignity, fosters human rights, emphasizes family values and prescribes equality of all before almighty God, regardless of sex, geographical origin, colour, class or creed. Islam assigns an important, indeed pivotal, role to women in society, and also in the family, the basic social unit of society.
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> "Concerns such as those over the issue of women in development being raised today are not new to the Islamic world. They had been dealt with in a judicious manner many centuries ago, and will continue to be addressed with the utmost importance.
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> "In fact, Islamic history is replete with examples of women in leadership roles. In current times we have seen women rise to the positions of prime minister and vice-president, to numerous levels of cabinet ministers, to seats in national parliaments and local legislatures and to senior positions in Governments of OIC member States. Outside of government, women hold responsible positions in universities and other institutions of higher education and research, in the medical, legal and other professions and in various branches of industry and commerce. Their number is on the increase. Despite the general social and economic problems, and their unsavoury consequences being experienced throughout the developing world, the need to address the economic and social constraints hampering women's empowerment remains a matter of priority in the development process of all OIC member States.
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> "Thus, throughout the Islamic world the Governments, supported by emerging societal institutions, are now endeavouring to support, within their means, social development programmes that cover, among other things, the provision of education and health care services, including reproductive health, to women so that they may be empowered sustainably to exercise all the rights that Islam has bestowed upon them in society and also to be equipped to fulfil their role as companions, thinkers, supporters, educators and managers within the sacred institution of the family.
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> "With this approach towards guarding and enhancing the status of women, the OIC member States participated in full measure in the Beijing Conference and spared no effort in contributing effectively to the formulation and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and, within their means and resources, they have been

faithfully implementing the Beijing instrument at national level in the perspective of the Declaration, which calls for the implementation to be carried out in accordance with the respective Constitutions, laws and religious and moral values of the countries concerned.

"At this stage I should like to refer briefly to the role of the OIC in promoting the advancement of women. At successive sessions of the three-yearly OIC summit conferences and of the annual Islamic conferences of foreign ministers serious and continuous attention has been paid to this aspect, resulting in action-oriented resolutions and decisions on each occasion. Thus, the last and eighth Islamic summit conference, held in Tehran in December 1997, reaffirmed the position of Islamic States at the Beijing Conference and reasserted its intention to implement the document adopted by the Conference. It requested the OIC general secretariat to coordinate its efforts with the Governments of member States to encourage forging sustainable relationships among women's organizations in member States. It set up an intergovernmental working group to harmonize the positions of all member States on issues related to women at international forums, particularly the United Nations. I am glad to be able to report that the OIC working group on the status of women here at the United Nations, in response to this resolution of the Islamic Summit, has actively participated in the preparatory stages of this special session, including the efforts to formulate its draft final outcome document.

"The strong resolve with which the OIC member States are participating in this special session of the General Assembly has been demonstrated by their active collaboration in all the preparatory phases that preceded the convening of this session. A further indication of our collective identification of the causes and purposes that have united us in this worthy effort is the fact that the delegations of 40 OIC member States and observers are headed by women, of which two are the First Ladies of their respective countries, two are Vice-Presidents, two are Deputy Prime Ministers, twenty-three are Cabinet Ministers and two are Deputy Ministers. A large number of non-governmental organizations of women from the Islamic countries are also attending this special session and have contributed actively to its work.

"I pledge the OIC's fullest cooperation and collaboration in working with the United Nations in the future to fulfil the worthy and noble objectives that have brought us together at this special session".

(spoke in French)

"I wish to conclude by stressing the undeniable fact that the concrete development of our societies cannot be attained or pursued without the genuine, effective participation of women in all political, economic and social activities. We must tackle this enormous but non-Utopian task if we are to build a happier future and more just and more humane societies".

The President: I call on Mr. Robert Paiva, Chairman of the observer delegation of the International Organization for Migration.

Mr. Paiva (International Organization for Migration): Women's place in today's international migratory flows is changing both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, women account for a growing percentage of migrant populations, and in several countries they already constitute the majority. Qualitatively, women are migrating independently, particularly as labour migrants, in vastly greater numbers than was the case in their mothers' or grandmothers' generation. These two factors, commonly referred to in shorthand as the feminization of migration, represent considerable challenges for migrant women, for Governments, for international and non-governmental organizations and for society at large.

Five years ago, at Beijing, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) made a four-point appeal to the international community: first, to recognize the trend towards the feminization of migration; second, to improve understanding of the conditions and needs specific to migrant women; third, to promote equal access to projects and services so that migrant women might fully participate in and benefit from them; and, fourth, to design and implement, where needed, programmes specifically for migrant women.

There has been progress since. For example, enhanced research and improved data collection have made for better awareness of women's important place in migration and highlighted some emerging issues. These include the effects of women's temporary labour migration on the empowerment of women, on the economy at the micro level and on the family that remains behind. Having recently completed a joint research project with the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which produced case studies on Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the IOM is pleased that this issue has been recognized and discussed during the Preparatory Committee process.

However, advances concerning migrant women in some areas are not matched in others. This is particularly true with respect to trafficking in women and girls. Indeed, this particularly abusive form of exploitation seems to be increasing.

No one is able to quantify the exact magnitude of trafficking today, not least because of its frequently clandestine nature and the lack of international agreement on how it is defined. However, there is steadily growing evidence to indicate that this has become a multi-billion-dollar business, often linked to organized criminal networks.

The IOM has been heavily involved in efforts to counter trafficking in women for nearly a decade. We began with research in countries of origin, transit and destination in order to better understand how women enter into trafficking networks and what conditions they face before, while and after they are trafficked. Our involvement was and is clearly linked to our migration mandate, although from the outset it was evident to us that trafficking in women is a human rights issue, an economic issue, a social issue, a gender issue and a criminal justice issue — as well as a migration issue.

Building on our research — which continues; a new volume on trafficking in Europe with case studies from Hungary, Poland and Ukraine is currently with our publisher — the IOM has focused on three areas of programme activity. The first is help for trafficked women: finding safe houses, providing counselling and medical attention and assisting in return and reintegration. Indeed, in this field, the IOM could do much more if additional resources were available. The second area of programme activity is capacity-building. A significant component of that is contributing to and fostering dialogue among Governments regarding their needs and experiences in combating traffickers and assisting trafficking victims. Regional migration dialogues have proven to be especially useful for advancing such policy dialogue. The third area is mass information campaigns about the realities of trafficking. These multimedia campaigns, while they cannot claim to be the sole tool for prevention, have the benefit of reaching both potential targets of traffickers and the general public, raising awareness of the ruses used in the trafficking trade and the abuses waiting at the other end.

The IOM is currently running counter-trafficking public information campaigns in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo and Thailand, building on previous successful efforts in the Philippines, Viet Nam and Ukraine. In these, as in all our trafficking-related activities, we especially value the close partnership we have developed with the non-governmental organization sector.

Over the course of the past few days it has been heartening to listen to government statements that recognize and face the challenge that trafficking in women represents. This is indeed an area where all States — North or South, country of origin or country of destination — share a common abhorrence of the abuses human beings are subjected to.

Success in dealing with trafficking in women will require strong and sustained international cooperation. The IOM's involvement to date is a clear indicator of the depth of our engagement in raising awareness of the realities of trafficking, as well as in meeting concrete needs with practical responses. I would like to underscore here today our commitment to continued action, in active partnership with similarly concerned governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. In that connection, it gives me pleasure to highlight the IOM's growing interaction with the United Nations system on trafficking issues.

Yes, there has been some encouraging progress over the past five years in addressing trafficking, but much more needs to be done over the next five years, and experience shows that much can be done if we all join forces.

The President: I call on Mrs. Mary Reiner Barnes, representative of the observer delegation of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mrs. Barnes (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): The Sovereign Military Order of Malta is pleased to take the floor at this special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

The Order of Malta, having been a member of the international community for many centuries, has served others — and this includes service to and by women — and is well qualified to understand the full meaning of this special session. Many issues have been raised, and much has been accomplished in the 25 years since the first World Conference on the status of women was convened in Mexico City. We welcome this opportunity to review and assess progress to date and to consider future actions and initiatives to ever more fully help all women and girls realize their potential.

Founded in 1099, the Order of Malta serves those who need us, regardless of nationality or opinion. Indeed, this vocation of assistance to and solidarity with the suffering and the weak, the victims of discrimination and intolerance, is our centuries-old mission. In accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we are committed to the right to life, which is to be defended everywhere and always, starting with the right to be born, and including rights to proper health care and education, and finally the right to a dignified death. Women are fully included in our programmes for individuals with special needs, such as our autism centre in France and our old-age homes in Austria, Germany, Chile and the United States, among others. In addition, we have programmes specially designed for girls and women. For instance, running hospitals is the Order's oldest task, but the Maternity Hospital of the Holy Family in Bethlehem specifically targets the needs of women in the community by guaranteeing normal obstetrical treatment, prenatal, post-natal, gynaecological and paediatric services. This hospital has become the reference hospital for the area, including its refugee camps, receiving an ever-increasing number of complicated cases. It is a project supported by the Order's members worldwide. It has special significance for the Order because it is located in the region where we were founded more than 900 years ago.

The hospital also features a programme that teaches women to be doctors and other medical workers. Thus, the Maternity Hospital of the Holy Family serves the mandates of recognizing and supporting the social significance of maternity, education and employment opportunities for women, as set forth in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and echoed in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Other health-care facilities supported by the Order of Malta include women's clinics in Lebanon and El Salvador. The Order of Malta also seeks to help assuage the pain resulting from the worldwide AIDS scourge by, among other projects, supporting a Dominican Republic centre run by nuns who provide housing for ex-prostitutes infected with the AIDS virus.

In addition, "Project Crudem" in Milot, Haiti, not only meets the medical needs of women and children served by this hospital and medical centre, but 600 children receive their education under its auspices. An Order of Malta hospital in Bonn, Germany, has a nursing school and kindergarten attached to the hospital. In Brazil, the Order has established kindergartens in São Paolo and Brasilia, in the vicinity of the *favelas*, to give unmarried mothers the possibility of working and also to provide health care for the children and their mothers. In São Paolo, educational opportunities are also provided for the mothers in the training centres attached to the kindergartens. Other purely educational Order projects include Portugal's home for the education of girls.

Therefore, besides seeking to improve the health care of women and girls and supporting motherhood by assisting unwed mothers, the Order of Malta worldwide supports their education and the resultant improved employment opportunities and poverty eradication.

Further Order of Malta projects address the needs of women suffering as a result of armed conflicts. At the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Order of Malta is one of the groups that has implemented programmes to help traumatized women in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo adjust to life after the region's war. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Order's "Bosnian Women's Initiative" has sponsored training courses, teaching computer skills, English and sewing, and social programmes, including health and emergency telephone counselling.

The "Kosovo Women's Initiative" has placed great emphasis on socio-psychological programmes entailing training courses in sewing and the opportunity to speak of traumatic experiences, since it is usually easier for these women to speak about such traumas during practical activities rather than in therapy groups.

As a result of armed conflicts in Africa, our programmes there have included the establishment of refugee field hospitals serving maternal needs during crises in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi and many other places. We have a women's project operating in the refugee camps on the frontier between Cambodia and Thailand.

Another Asian project that the Order of Malta supports is the women-oriented project "Health for One Million" in Kerala, India, which seeks to improve the living situation of women and children in rural areas of the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, South India. This is accomplished by, for instance, giving classes in basic health care, sanitation and hygiene, child care and nutrition, and sponsoring income-generating activities to improve women's quality of life. Since most of the programme's beneficiaries are married women who are mothers, and a mother plays an important role in maintaining a healthy nutritional status for the family, all the project's activities are centred around the mothers, through whom the entire community is served. Unless the community standard of living is raised or improved, the goal of health promotion cannot be achieved. Thus this project also promotes motherhood, health and education for women and girls, and poverty eradication by providing income-generating activities as a means for women to improve their economic position.

Further supporting motherhood, the Order sponsors a number of homes for unwed mothers in the United States. The needs of elderly women are also recognized in the Order's support of convents for older nuns, in addition to the homes for both older men and women that it runs.

Finally, as stated above, besides serving girls and women, the Order has included women since it began. At its inception many women were sisters who also assisted in nursing, and in the mid-eighteenth century, a medical degree was conferred on a woman at the Order's medical college and hospital in Malta, where she also performed surgery. The Order's history of uniting health care and scientific research continues to this day. Our work at the Bethlehem Hospital and also in the ophthalmic research sector at São Paolo University in Brazil are two examples.

Within itself, the Order is seeing an increased presence of female members — its Dames. Also, some of the Order of Malta's auxiliary services provide for young girls to participate, thereby instilling a sense of social responsibility right from a girl's childhood. Such activities may be found in many countries where the Order is active, for example, in Ireland, with its Ambulance Corps, and in Lithuania.

Thus, as established above, the Order of Malta has actively supported the role of women in the development of society and the social significance of maternity, and provided for their education and means to employment, thereby clearly echoing mandates set forth in the CEDAW and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. Also as noted, we have further addressed critical areas raised in the Beijing Platform for Action through our programmes that encompass women and the particular issues they face concerning poverty, armed conflict, the economy, decision-making, human rights, as well as those special concerns of the girl child, among others.

In sum, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta appreciates the opportunity for exchange in this area of great concern. It calls on all Observers and Member States of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other interested parties to support all efforts to eradicate social injustice and poverty by promoting the role of women and motherhood and the education of women, whether a woman is a stay-at-home mother, professional woman or both. I myself — being a woman, Dame of Malta, wife, expectant mother and lawyer — have more than just a passing interest in these issues.

Finally, being politically neutral, striving ever to promote peace in the world, and a supra-national entity having full diplomatic relations with nearly 90 countries around the world that also has a particular commitment with respect to international aid, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta is uniquely placed to serve comprehensively the needs of women and girls, and welcomes the opportunity for further coordination with United Nations Member States, Observers and other entities in providing the means for women and girls to fulfil their societal potential.

The President: I give the floor to Mrs. Mariapia Garavaglia, Vice-President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mrs. Garavaglia (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) (*spoke in French*): For several decades, we had believed that inequalities between men and women would come to an end when legislation became more balanced, women received as much formal education as men, and the problem of arranging day care for small children was overcome.

In the 1990s, however, we have had to recognize that this is not enough. It is obvious from this review session that a much stronger political will is needed to put the theory of gender equality into practice. In this regard the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies fully supports the proposed framework for further actions and initiatives submitted by the Commission on the Status of Women to this special session, and in particular the commitment to create an enabling environment to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

I would like to take this opportunity to recall that the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies last year adopted a special policy on gender equality. Our goal is to ensure that all Red Cross and Red Crescent programmes benefit men and women equally, according to their different needs, and that men and women participate equally at all levels within our 176 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, our Secretariat in Geneva and its field offices in 67 countries. The adoption of this policy has helped us to place gender equality high on our political agenda.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies recognizes that natural disasters, conflicts and social and political instability may affect men and women differently and that Red Cross and Red Crescent emergency response and long-term humanitarian assistance may also have a different impact on men and women. Therefore, we will continuously review our own system to incorporate gender analysis in the assessment, planning and reporting of programmes, including our disaster response, disaster preparedness and provision of community-based health services.

We also know that, despite the positive developments within our organization, we need to enhance further the Red Cross and Red Crescent capacity to take the gender perspective into account in their policies and programmes. In particular, we need to develop the competence of staff members in applying gender analysis in programming and ensuring accountability in this regard. We also recognize that new initiatives must be taken to ensure the balanced participation of men and women from all sectors of society in Red Cross and Red Crescent work. At the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent held last year, we pledged, inter alia, to ensure equal opportunities for men and women of all ages as volunteers in service delivery and leadership and to increase the involvement of marginalized groups.

We believe that the framework for further actions and initiatives to emerge from this session should pay special attention to the following areas.

It must ensure that the operational tools, skills and knowledge necessary to the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming are developed and widely shared. In this regard, we believe that gender specialists and advisers at various agencies, including the United Nations, must play more practical roles.

It must also ensure the high quality of humanitarian assistance that meets the different needs of men and women in time of natural disasters. In this relation, we would draw the attention of the special session to the need to apply minimum practical standards to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, such as those elaborated in the Sphere project, based on the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, which was endorsed by the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent last year. The incorporation of gender analysis in our response mechanisms will allow us to ensure that our service is rapid and effective.

It must strengthen mechanisms of cooperation and coordination among States, United Nations agencies, international organizations, the Red Cross, the Red Crescent and non-governmental organizations in order more effectively to reduce discrimination and violence in the home and in the community. As we said five years ago in Beijing, States must pay special attention to the prevention and reduction of violence against women.

To conclude, we in the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies hope that this

special session will reaffirm the commitment of the international community to the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Most especially, we hope that the outcome document of this special session will be not just a new plan, but a working tool based on lessons learned from obstacles encountered in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Francesca Cook, representative of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Ms. Cook (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development): I bring greetings from the Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Sally Shelton-Colby, who is unfortunately unable to be with us this evening. She would like to join previous speakers in thanking the United Nations for organizing this important Conference. The OECD is particularly pleased to participate here, as we have been actively involved in the international community's efforts to advance gender equality as a key element of the development and peace agendas for some time now. This follow-up to Beijing has inspired us, in fact, to revitalize our own efforts to strengthen opportunities for gender equality and we are reinforcing the way we mainstream gender into the substantive policy work of the OECD as a whole.

The OECD is an intergovernmental organization concerned with promoting the triangular paradigm of good governance, social cohesion and economic growth. Its 29 member countries also produce more than 60 per cent of world economic output. On that basis, the OECD and its members have a key role to play in the promotion of gender equality worldwide. We encourage our members to provide policies and incentives to equalize access by women and men to productive resources and to the opportunities offered by globalization.

We work for open and competitive labour and capital markets, just legal and regulatory frameworks and socially responsible government and business that treat men and women equally. We encourage Governments to listen to men's and women's voices because better governed public sectors, sustainable development and more widespread and vibrant civil societies that enjoy human rights and social justice and experience less violent conflict are our common global vision.

We know that none of this is possible without equality between women and men. The full utilization of men's and women's contributions and the realization of their potentials are essential in order for countries to take full advantage of the new global marketplace. We also know that better mainstreaming of gender perspectives is largely a question of sustained political will. In no society do women fare as well as men or enjoy the same opportunities. Though gender gaps vary from place to place, these are not dependent on whether a country is rich or poor, whether its economy is industrialized, in transition or developing, or whether it is at peace or in conflict.

In fact, some developing countries outperform OECD countries in the opportunities they make available to women in some spheres. For example, South Africa and Argentina follow four OECD countries as the only six in the world where women occupy more than 30 per cent of parliamentary seats. The figures for the other 25 out of the 29 OECD countries range from 29 per cent to fewer than 5 per cent. These and other inequalities represent the loss of important human and economic potential on a global scale, and this poses a major challenge ahead in the twenty-first century.

We hope to increase awareness of the importance of gender in policy-making and to act as a catalyst for change towards the promotion of greater equality worldwide. We know that we need to do more in our own countries and in our outreach and development assistance efforts. Recognizing this, the Secretary-General of the OECD has launched a renewed initiative for active gender mainstreaming throughout the substantive work of the organization and for improved career opportunities in its Secretariat.

I will describe briefly a few of the major gender initiatives of the organization.

For a number of years now, the OECD has been promoting increased acknowledgement of the role that women play in the economy and society, and aiming to improve the conditions under which women run their businesses. In 1997, we held a conference on women entrepreneurs, which focused on their contributions to increased employment and innovation worldwide. In November this year, we will hold a second conference, which will focus on encouraging women entrepreneurs' participation in the global economy; strengthening international women's business networks; increasing

their access to and use of new technologies; and, finally, easing obstacles to financing their businesses. This increased policy attention to women entrepreneurs around the world points to a growing awareness of their role as a driving force in economic growth and development.

The OECD also routinely includes gender implications in its work in the areas of education, employment, labour markets and social affairs for member and non-member economies. It collects necessary statistical data, analyses the different situations of men and women, and draws policy conclusions as appropriate. We know, for example, that employment patterns of women and men in OECD countries are converging, but at the same time there are still large differences between countries, and no country can be said to have achieved gender equality in the labour market. For example, while employment rates of men and women in Sweden are now very close, the level of occupational segregation in Sweden remains high. And, although all OECD countries have laws designed to ensure that women and men doing the same jobs have equal rates of pay, in practice women continue to receive less pay than men in all countries.

We also have a number of conferences and publications that specifically address gender inequality. In 1998 a conference was held on changing labour markets and gender equality, and a publication was issued on the future of female-dominated occupations. We are happy to announce that we will hold a ministerial-level conference focusing on how including gender perspectives in economic, industry and labour market policies renders them more efficient, effective and equitable. Entitled "Gender mainstreaming, competitiveness and growth: what, why and how", it will take place in November this year. Other work focuses on supporting the care economy, improving the work/life balance, and exploring how to engender national budgets.

Finally, with regard to our outreach activities, in preparation for the Beijing Conference, the OECD bilateral donors of the Development Assistance Committee adopted a landmark statement, the "Development Assistance Committee Gender Equality Statement". It underlines women's empowerment and equality as vital for sustainable, people-centred development. The statement established goals for bilateral aid agencies and requested the Development Assistance Committee to embark on a mainstreaming strategy.

In the perspective of this special session, the recent ministerial meeting of the Development Assistance Committee assessed progress made since the holding of the Beijing Conference. The report "Progress towards gender equality in the perspective of Beijing+5" has been distributed at this session. It identifies nine future priorities for the international community to push the agenda forward. Through it the bilateral development cooperation ministers and heads of agencies reconfirmed the basic importance of gender equality and women's empowerment to development progress. They also recognized that, while there has been much headway in integrating gender into the development strategies of bilateral OECD donors, there is still a long way to go in terms of real commitment to providing the resources necessary for thorough implementation of policies. We hope that, in conjunction with the conclusions of this special session, the ministers' reconfirmations will serve as a strong impetus for bilateral donors and their partners and the OECD's outreach activities.

Finally, this month at the Copenhagen+5 summit a publication entitled "A Better World for All" will be launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. A joint publication of the United Nations, the OECD, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, it will present a state-of-play report on progress on seven internationally agreed development goals, including demonstrated progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. We hope that it will serve as an advocacy tool and that it will be distributed worldwide.

When the struggle for gender equality that so many of us are waging finally succeeds, as it must, it will mark a great step forward in human progress. We at the OECD are working with renewed determination to provide the necessary attention and resources to ensure that today's women, as well as men, contribute their full potential to the prosperous, safe and equitable societies of tomorrow that we all need and that we are all striving so hard to secure.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Helle Degn, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Ms. Degn (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe): After 25 years and four United

Nations World Conferences on Women, the poorest women still have to fight for their rights, in the political sense, in all aspects of life. The gap between rich men and poor women is growing. Are we not able to do better after 25 years? We simply have to. No mild or soft words can be said about situations in which women have been denied all dignity, been raped or tortured, or in which they cannot enjoy freedom or even the right to speak or vote.

We must insist on human rights. Violence against women has grown. Trade in women and children has grown. The feminization of poverty has grown. The share of seats in parliaments for women has increased only from 7 per cent to 12 per cent during the last 25 years' journey from Mexico to New York. Likewise, commitments to fanaticism have grown. We therefore have to commit ourselves for the next women's world conference, in 2005.

This Beijing+5 special session is taking place in a markedly different ideological environment compared with that of the 1995 World Conference on Women. However, human rights have become an inseparable part of the quest for stable, democratic rules. And a significant number of the world's Governments have committed themselves to respect and observe these rules. Despite the dynamism of human rights movements, a wide gulf remains between the articulation of global principles and their application in many national settings.

In its activities the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which I represent, harmonizes human rights and the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The OSCE promotes gender mainstreaming among its participating States. It is particularly active in areas that are among the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. Furthermore, it is committed to creating a professional work environment where all staff members are treated equally and with respect.

The essential elements for the OSCE include its accent on policy processes. One of the prerequisites for gender mainstreaming is transparency in the policy-making process. Another is political will. The OSCE promotes both the political will and the development of gender-sensitive policies and activities.

In regard to violence against women there is an increased awareness of violence against women and girls not as a private matter, but as a human rights violation. Another element is successful cooperation between governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in preventing violence against women.

The OSCE is effectively working with non-governmental organizations and governmental organizations in the host countries of its field operations. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is actively developing activities with regard to combating trafficking in human beings. It has issued an Action Plan 2000 for activities to combat trafficking and to assist in legislative reform and assistance to victims of trafficking.

We are obviously committed to women in armed conflict and to the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Court. The OSCE supports the international efforts to bring the perpetrators of war-related gender-based crimes to justice, and accepts rape as a war crime. In its platform for action and in its action plan for gender issues, the OSCE refers to these efforts and it is committed to supporting them.

The area relating to women and power and decision-making takes note of the growing acceptance of the importance to society of the full participation of women in decision-making and power at all levels, including in the intergovernmental sector. It calls for increased wisdom on the part of men and a willingness to share power, and to adapt organizational and political structures to make them woman-friendly. To empower women and to bring them into politics is, furthermore, one of the focuses of OSCE gender projects. The OSCE, particularly in its missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina, has actively supported the gender task force for the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe.

The section on human rights refers to efforts to mainstream the human rights of women and a gender perspective into the United Nations system.

Gender issues are increasingly being brought to the forefront of OSCE activities. One important consequence of this ongoing debate has been that two of the major OSCE institutions have appointed gender advisers, who are now working on a broad front to mainstream gender issues into the day-to-day work of the OSCE. Given the impact of the work of the gender advisers, it is my earnest hope that other OSCE

institutions, including my own, will follow the example and also appoint gender advisers of their own.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly also incorporates the priority areas of the Beijing process into its work. With respect to women and power and decision-making, the Parliamentary Assembly strives to ensure greater democratic political participation, and this clearly includes women, who are at present strongly underrepresented in almost all OSCE participating States. As President of the Parliamentary Assembly, I have repeatedly called for a greater emphasis on gender equality within the OSCE, in line with the 1998 declaration adopted at Copenhagen by the Parliamentary Assembly. The Parliamentary Assembly also calls for a stronger incorporation of gender perspectives into the work of OSCE missions in the areas of conflict-prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation, as well as in democratization and institution-building.

Some countries in my part of the world have seen a resurgence of patriarchal traditions that subordinate women within the family. In a number of countries, traditional religious views continue to restrict women's possibilities for empowerment. In all OSCE countries, domestic violence remains a major problem for women, although too often a rather hidden one. Less than 10 years ago, some OSCE countries were the scene of barbaric warfare where war crimes, including widespread rape of women and girls, were used as an instrument of ethnic cleansing. Thanks not least to efforts by the OSCE, that part of the world is now a somewhat more peaceful place. However, some regional conflicts continue to smoulder, with women and children as primary targets and victims.

While the overall picture remains bleak, I must stress in all fairness that the last couple of years have seen a great debate on gender issues within the OSCE, followed by concerted efforts to implement commitments to ensure gender equality.

I wish this special session a successful outcome.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hussein Hassouna, chairman of the observer delegation of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Hassouna (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure, Sir, to congratulate you warmly on your election as President of this important special session of the General Assembly, which is soon to come to a close. Your experience and wisdom have guaranteed that its work is progressing towards a successful conclusion.

This special session of the General Assembly is especially important because it marks a turning point with respect to the critical needs of women, women's issues in general, and participation by women in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life as a key element of sustainable human development. Perhaps the most important proof of international interest in this session and of the vital issues it is considering is the wide participation of women from all over the world, who are here to reaffirm their determination to continue on their path until they reach their noble objectives. Here, on behalf of the League of Arab States, I hail this important gathering and the active and effective participation by all delegations, including those of Arab States, which throughout the debate have put forward constructive proposals with a view to ensuring the success of this session.

The firm and positive response of the States members of the League of Arab States with respect to addressing the challenges set out at Beijing through the formulation of policies and strategies and the implementation of programmes has brought Arab women closer to realizing their aspirations. There have been intensive efforts to promote the advancement of Arab women; these are consistently followed up with strategies and national and international plans of action with a view to meeting the needs and addressing the priorities of women in Arab society. Considerable achievements have been made in this sphere thanks to the adoption by Arab States, by Arab institutions and in Arab workplaces, in cooperation with United Nations institutions, of a variety of measures. Positive steps have been taken to empower Arab women, to promote their advancement and to enhance their capabilities. These reflect a conviction that development plans can attain their objectives only with the participation of women in their planning and implementation, and as beneficiaries of their results. On the Arab regional level, that conviction was reflected in the formation of a standing committee for Arab women; this took place in 1971, well before the Beijing Conference. Moreover the League of Arab States has a department for women's affairs.

At the official level, our policies have put women on the agenda of the political plan of action, and resolutions have been adopted to promote the

advancement of women. National decisions and strategies for women have also been implemented, and women have been recruited for decision-making positions. Arab legislation reaffirms the equal status of women and men and the opportunity for women to enjoy all their rights; it has eliminated all obstacles in the way of progress for women, so that women are able to consolidate their position and narrow the gap between women and men in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life. This is reflected also in the growing number of Arab States that have acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In spite of all this, there have been failures with respect to the progress of Arab women. These result from a number of challenges, including the fact that many Arab women experience illiteracy, poverty and lack of participation in production and in governmental decision-making.

Political, economic and social factors in the Arab region, as well as wars in the region, have meant that some objectives relating to women have not been given national priority. This has prevented the achievement of the desired success in women's issues, unlike the successes that have been achieved in health, education and other areas of work.

In these circumstances, compounded by the changes due to rapid globalization, we must adopt all necessary measures to safeguard women and create an enabling environment to increase their participation. We must give them a greater role in development activities and the necessary machinery with which they can intensify development assistance in order to alleviate poverty and improve living standards.

The League of Arab States attaches the same degree of importance to the need to reach fair solutions in the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. It also attaches great importance to the elimination of all types of economic embargoes imposed upon Arab countries, with a view to eliminating their negative impact on women and children. It further emphasizes the need to free all prisoners of war in places of conflict.

We are convinced that the creation of a propitious environment for the achievement of international objectives for the advancement of the status of women and the achievement of equality and development in the twenty-first century means that we have to work hard to write off the debt of poor countries, stop the arms race, redirect available funds to consolidate sustainable development efforts, solve the unemployment problem and eliminate poverty, which affects women more severely.

The League of Arab States expresses the hope that considerable progress will be achieved at this session regarding priority issues for women. We reaffirm the plans resulting from Beijing and the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, as well as the clear and established Arab positions taken in this regard. We respect the diversity and differences between cultures, values and human convictions that govern human society, and we take them into consideration in recording the outcome of this session.

In conclusion, I emphasize that the success of this session will depend essentially on the commitment of participants to continue the implementation of the provisions and guidelines of the final document. However, the indicators for success are already obvious in the active interaction among women throughout the world and in the consolidation of an increased international awareness of the importance of women's issues, their rights and their pivotal role in the family and society. This awareness creates a propitious atmosphere for the adoption of resolutions required internationally, nationally and regionally in order to implement the concepts and guidelines that have been agreed upon during this session. We are convinced that the results will be on a par with our hopes and with the aspirations of women throughout the world.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Doutoum Mahmat, Assistant Secretary-General, representative of the Secretary-General, of the Organization of African Unity.

Mr. Mahmat (Organization of African Unity) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), it is a great honour for me to share with the Assembly today the OAU's perspective on the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

The question that confronts us all today is: halfway through the time-frame we set ourselves for the implementation of the Beijing framework Platform for Action, exactly how far have we come? This question raises an even more important question: how

do we ensure that we meet the targets within the agreed time-frame?

We are meeting here today not only because the Beijing Platform for Action requires us to do so, but also because of our shared concern about the constraints on the Platform's implementation. The OAU remains fully committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in all areas of life. Our Organization regards the African and Beijing Platforms for Action as providing appropriate blueprints for the creation of a more just and egalitarian society, for we should not forget that the full and effective participation of women on an equal basis is a precondition for sustainable peace and development and for human progress generally.

Since our continental organization was created in May 1963 its commitment to socio-economic progress and the emancipation of the peoples of Africa has remained firm and unwavering. The founding fathers of the OAU were inspired by the vision of a continent resplendent with success and achievements in all areas of human endeavour. They were equally aware of the need to create and maintain an environment that nurtures understanding, cooperation and solidarity in a larger unity that transcends all divisions and ideological and ethnic disputes and scorns considerations of nationality or gender. In so doing, the founding fathers enshrined forever in the OAU Charter the bases for safeguarding Africa's peace, security and stability.

However, 37 years later Africa not only faces complex and daunting socio-economic challenges, but is also beleaguered by seemingly intractable conflicts which, as our leaders have observed, have caused death and untold human suffering, engendered hatred and divided nations and families. They have forced millions of our compatriots to the wandering life of refugees and displaced persons, deprived of their livelihood, human dignity and hope.

The OAU has constantly stated that peace is a prerequisite for development and that the absence of peace results in disorganization, disorder and the irrational use of resources, and is both the result and the cause of widespread violations of human rights. It is now a truism that the oppression of women is a violation of fundamental rights and therefore is not compatible with peace and development. Just as peace and development are inextricably linked, so is development inextricably linked to the integration of women because logically development should lead to the improvement of living and working conditions of all members of society.

Development is synonymous with the transformation of society, which requires the development of human resources through, inter alia, education, training and access to new information technology. This is why success in the economic sector will facilitate the struggle for women's emancipation. Because of the dynamics of their productive and reproductive roles, women are usually excluded from the development process. Hence there is the paradox that while society needs the emancipation of women, which is essential for development, it makes it difficult for them to have access to the tools of change.

The OAU devotes much of its time to conflict prevention, management and resolution. Reacting to the outbreak of new conflicts in Africa, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government created in Cairo in 1993 an OAU mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. Women and children being particularly vulnerable in conflict situations and as displaced persons, they need to be involved in conflict prevention, management and resolution. Therefore, in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the OAU established in 1998 the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development, with the mandate of ensuring the effective participation of women in our continent's peace and development process.

Another pressing problem facing Africa is that of HIV/AIDS. This global pandemic has had a particularly devastating effect on Africa; AIDS claims more victims than all the conflicts on our continent. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, especially in situations of civil unrest, social upheaval and population displacements. The situation is exacerbated by inadequate food security and medical services in these situations. There is, therefore, a need to pay special attention to the conditions and specific needs of these women. More specifically, we now have to link HIV/AIDS problems to women's advocacy for peace. For its part, the OAU has adopted declarations on the AIDS pandemic in Africa, on children facing HIV/AIDS and on the status of African women in the context of family health, constituting an African plan of action. Now we need to implement these declarations within the framework of the new

international partnership for the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

In the economic area, the OAU works with African women entrepreneurs in order to ensure women's economic empowerment and their integration into the economic process.

With regard to education and literacy, I am happy to state that the OAU member States have declared an OAU decade for education in Africa, covering the period 1997 to 2006, and that in this context the OAU has been following up the Kampala Declaration and its action plan.

With regard to women's legal and human rights, the OAU, through the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, has appointed a special rapporteur on the rights of women in Africa, and it is in the process of concluding an additional protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights related to women's rights. More recently, the OAU has been working with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa within the context of the sixth African regional conference on women, held as part of this Beijing+5 review process. The OAU Council of Ministers has since adopted the African plan of action resulting from the sixth regional conference for the accelerated implementation of the African and Beijing Platforms for Action.

These are only some of the highlights of OAU activities to integrate into its policies and programmes issues linked to the status of women.

In conclusion, I reaffirm the OAU commitment to the speedy implementation of the African and Beijing Platforms for Action, as well as its commitments to work closely with all partners to achieve this common goal. Therefore, it is my sincere hope that this Beijing+5 review process will lead to the formulation of new, more effective strategies which will allow us to move beyond rhetoric to concrete action aimed at empowering women to participate in the development of our continent.

The President: I call on Mrs. Akiko Domoto, Chairperson of the observer delegation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Mrs. Domoto: It is an honour to speak on behalf of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) on this special occasion.

Increased gender equity and equality certainly enhances participatory processes required to solve environmental, economic and social problems that threaten peace and human well-being in this new millennium. While it is not a complete solution to these problems, it is crucial to open the door to more creative, user-responsive, socially sustainable and fair solutions to them. Several studies have shown that improving women's education, income and status, as well as increasing their opportunities in the decision-making process, enhances their families' food security, health and well-being. It also has an impact on fertility reduction and long-term effects on the capacity of community organization to better respond to environmental and social challenges.

Gender equity within participatory management of natural resources promotes a more equitable sharing of their costs and benefits. In addition to creating access to and control of resources between men and women, and empowering women in decision-making, women's traditional knowledge of biodiversity and ecosystem management can be recognized, valued and used to promote environmental sustainability. In this way, promoting gender equity and equality is a concrete step to enhance peace and human security in the search for fairer and more harmonious relationships among people and with the environment.

The IUCN welcomes the efforts made by the United Nations following the Fourth World Conference on Women to draw attention to the importance of promoting gender equity and equality to ensure social and environmental sustainability and security, while engaging a large variety of governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in this initiative.

The IUCN — The World Conservation Union — was created in 1948. It is the world's largest conservation-related organization, bringing together 76 States, 11 government agencies, 732 non-governmental organizations, 36 affiliates and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership. For more than half a century the IUCN has made efforts to shape a just world that values and conserves nature. Its mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that

any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

Concerns for social and gender equity have been a fundamental issue for the IUCN, which understands that conservation is a process that requires changing social behaviour at the individual and institutional levels. The IUCN has promoted the concepts of sustainable development and sustainable use of natural resources since "Caring for the Earth" in 1992, through several initiatives carried out at the policy and field levels, on a global, regional, national and local basis.

In 1998 IUCN adopted a policy statement on gender mainstreaming in which it recognizes that adopting a gender perspective means focusing on both men and women and their relationships with each other and natural resources. Only with a gender perspective can a complete picture of human relationships and human interaction with natural resources be built up.

IUCN's rationale for integrating a gender perspective and gender concerns is based on two important premises: first, the recognition that gender equality and equity are matters of fundamental human rights and social justice, and secondly, the growing awareness that equality is a precondition for sustainable development and the sustainable use of natural resources.

This year, IUCN adopted a policy statement on social equity within the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Aware of its role and capacity, IUCN has developed tools and protocols to integrate gender within the field project cycle and within environmental policies. The IUCN Regional Office for Meso-America (ORMA) has taken a clear leadership role in this process. Since 1992, more than 2,000 people have been trained in how to link environment and gender. Training modules and research have been conducted in order to provide theoretical and practical skills in linking equity and equality to sustainable development. Ministries of environment have also received support and collaboration in their efforts to develop policies that integrate gender into their sectors.

A collaboration between ORMA and the Global Social Policy Programme is making our expertise and tools available to support similar processes in other regions in which IUCN members are interested. The nine training modules of the "Towards Equity" series, produced by ORMA, are being published in English this month.

Other regional efforts, in the form of networking and information-sharing, have been promoted in places like Asia, where members exchange gender information and experience in the IUCN *Gender and Environment in Asia* newsletter.

Because of its experience and success in addressing gender equity and equality thus far, IUCN is very happy to support its members and partners who are committed to gender mainstreaming within national environmental policies and sustainable development initiatives, in addition to building the institutional capacity to carry out this process.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Mrs. Amabel Orraca-Ndiaye, Chief Cooperation Officer of the African Development Bank.

Mrs. Orraca-Ndiaye (African Development Bank): On behalf of the African Development Bank (ADB), my delegation would like to convey its deepest gratitude to the Secretary-General for the invitation to this landmark event, which brings together such distinguished personalities from all over the world.

This occasion represents the greatest honour for me — the first daughter of a highly empowered woman, my mother. May I pay tribute to other mothers all over the world who single-handedly raise children, giving them equal chances to a better education and equal chances to better their lives, irrespective of their sex. It is also the proudest moment for my daughter and, indeed, for girls of her generation, that I am speaking on behalf of the African Development Bank and its achievements five years after the Beijing Conference.

The mandate that was given to financial agencies in the Beijing Platform for Action was to provide opportunities for the empowerment and mainstreaming of women in the economic area and to eliminate gender biases in their operations. In this respect, I am pleased to report that this mandate has acted as the catalyst for a number of activities undertaken by ADB at the policy, project and institutional level.

At the policy level, for example, ADB's New Vision Statement clearly identifies poverty reduction as the primary development challenge facing Africa, which is a priority area of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Thus the utilization of the Bank's resources are crystallized around four themes that are central to women's

empowerment, namely agriculture and rural development; human capital development; private sector development; and good governance.

Furthermore, the lending policy and guidelines adopted to operationalize the Vision Statement underscores mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and projects in order to facilitate a dynamic and central role for women. The guidelines also emphasize the application of gender analysis tools to development planning and the utilization of gender-sensitive indicators to assess the effectiveness of the Bank's approach. In this respect, it is important to note that the Bank has adopted a Country Policy and Institutional Assessment in which women's empowerment constitutes an element of assessment as the basis for the allocation of resources to regional member countries. This tool enables the Bank to determine the quality and effectiveness of the policy, legal and institutional frameworks for the advancement of women of beneficiary countries in areas such as the education of girls, health services and the implementation of pro-equality legal reforms.

In line with the Beijing Platform for Action, ADB has reviewed its poverty-alleviation strategy and its policies in agricultural development, health, education, population, cooperation with civil societies and governance to reflect the gender perspective.

In promoting gender mainstreaming the African Development Bank has adopted a two-pronged approach, namely through sectoral interventions and through financing women in development projects. Thus, between 1990 and 1998, a total of 134 gender-related projects in sectors such as agriculture, health and public utilities were financed.

Mrs. Yai (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Examples of such projects are the Rural Water Project in Zimbabwe and the Rural Electrification Project in Malawi, which improved women's access to potable water and increased their productivity in food processing; the Palm Oil Project in the Central African Republic and the Sugar Project in Madagascar, which have encouraged the establishment of women's marketing cooperatives and enhanced family life; education projects in countries such as Benin, Djibouti and Senegal, among others, which have specific components that benefit exclusively female students with a view to raising female enrolment ratios in basic education; and health projects in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Mozambique, which provide specialized series for women of child-bearing age and children in rural areas.

Since 1997, a new generation of poverty reduction projects, including those in the Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Mali, Tanzania and Uganda, have been designed to be participatory and demand-driven and to pay special attention to reducing poverty among women. In addition, 12 women-in-development stand-alone projects have been financed in Senegal, Mali, Malawi, Gambia, Guinea and Ghana, to name a few, all of which seek to address issues such as women's lack of education, access to factors of production and social services.

Altogether, these poverty reduction activities that ingrain gender mainstreaming and the women-in-development stand-alone projects amount to some $17.2 million, that is, 11.2 per cent of the cumulative Bank Group commitments for the period 1990-1998.

Another initiative by the Bank worth mentioning is the African Development Fund Microfinance Initiative for Africa, also known as AMINA, which was set up in 1998. The objective is to strengthen the capacity of existing African microfinance institutions to deliver a wide range of financial services to microentrepreneurs. At the institutional level, the ADB is implementing a number of measures through its recruitment and promotion procedures to enhance the participation of women staff members in the senior echelons of the Bank.

Although we are happy to report the progress made by the ADB, the Bank recognizes that there is still room for major improvements. Consequently, a steering committee for gender issues was recently established with a clear mandate to determine and prioritize gender reforms, formulate an action plan and develop gender targets, among others. In addition, the Bank is in the process of reviewing and elaborating its policy on gender equality, which will guide its lending and non-lending activities. It is the fervent expectation of my delegation that the priorities and new perspectives arising from this special session will be reflected in this gender-equality policy document.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that the focus of this session, which is to monitor progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, lies at the heart of the African Development Bank's gender work. I wish, therefore, to reaffirm the

commitment of the ADB Group to promoting gender and development issues in Africa. It is the hope of my delegation that the special session will result in practical recommendations that will give new vigour and lead to the acceleration of the implementation of the Platform for Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aída González Martínez, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Mrs. González Martínez (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me, as Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to have the opportunity to address the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". The special session has been convened to review the progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted almost five years ago in Beijing and to identify further actions Member States must take to address the new challenges to the advancement of women that have arisen since 1995.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, drafted on the recommendation of the World Conference of the International Women's Year held in my country, Mexico, in 1975, has now been ratified by 165 States. It is the only international instrument which sets out human rights norms for women and girls in the entire range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres of both public and private life. It is known throughout the world as the charter of women's human rights. It is also relevant to point out that the Convention was drafted between 1976 and 1979, just as the United Nations was defining the policy framework for women's development.

Since its inception in 1982, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, of which I am honoured to be Chairperson, has conducted its work in parallel with the intergovernmental process. Gradually, further political goals for ending discrimination against women and achieving de facto and de jure equality between women and men have been established by this means.

Twenty years after Mexico, the Fourth World Conference on Women was a crucial success. It marked the culmination of the intergovernmental political process for the development of women's human rights, recognized in the Platform for Action. It is not for nothing that the Platform reaffirms that all the human rights of women and the girl child — civil, political, cultural, economic and social — are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. For that reason, the Platform also urges universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the withdrawal or limitation of the scope of any reservations; and the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention.

The Platform for Action entrusted a very important role to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It specifically invited States parties to the Convention to include in their reports information on measures taken to implement the Platform. This has allowed the Committee to monitor more effectively women's capacity to enjoy the human rights guaranteed by the Convention.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Committee has held eight sessions, at which it has considered the reports of 65 States parties. This has given it a very detailed and substantive overview of the situation of women throughout the world, the progress made in implementing the Platform and the continuing challenges to its implementation. Among other things, the overview demonstrates that progress has been particularly notable in the legislative sphere and that significant measures have been taken to eliminate de jure inequality between women and men. It has also identified the persistence of stereotyped attitudes towards men's and women's roles, and the adverse consequences which economic privatization, liberalization and globalization have had for women in a number of countries.

Global conferences are political processes which allow critical problems to be identified and an international policy framework to be developed for tackling them. The human rights treaties establish obligations which are legally binding on States and the work of the treaty bodies, such as the Committee over which I preside, provides a mechanism for overseeing and ensuring the fulfilment of those obligations at the national level. The implementation of the Platform for Action and that of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are distinct but parallel processes. The Fourth World

Conference on Women identified the clear and essential link that has existed since 1975 between the political dialogue and the legal norms for the advancement of women, a link which has been strengthened over the past five years.

The implementation of the Platform for Action has been moulded in a human rights perspective and the General Assembly's adoption in December 1999 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention fulfilled one of the Platform's recommendations in the human rights area. The Optional Protocol has so far been signed by 35 States and ratified by three.

In order to emphasize the importance to women of this human rights perspective, the Committee adopted a declaration on the legal framework for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and on the close relationship between the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action.

This special session provides an opportunity to reaffirm the central role of women's human rights and the importance of implementing the Convention in achieving gender equality, development and peace. It is also an opportunity to strengthen the links between the policy and legal frameworks for the advancement of women. In this context, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would like to encourage the General Assembly to recognize the very close interrelationship between the implementation of the Platform and the Convention.

On behalf of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, I wish to reaffirm here our interest in, and our commitment to, continuing to support the implementation of the Platform and the intergovernmental process undertaken by the Assembly in following up and evaluating the Beijing Conference, as well as any actions that the Assembly may soon decide to recommend to ensure the full implementation of the Platform for Action to bring about the full and equal development of all the women of the world in the twenty-first century.

I wish the Assembly every success.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund.

Dr. Sadik (United Nations Population Fund): First of all, I have to say how impressed I am that there are still so many people in the Hall. It is a great pleasure to be among delegations, women leaders, non-governmental organizations and women from all over the world who all think and, I hope, want to act together.

I had hoped to deliver a different sort of statement today, pointing out all the progress that has been made by women and on their behalf since we met in Beijing five years ago. I had hoped to be able to congratulate all of us, all the participants in this process, on a document that would have been the basis for our agreement to consolidate the movements towards equality and justice for all the world's people.

Unfortunately, it seems that this special session is still having difficulties in reaching agreement on language concerning some of the most basic human rights as they affect women: the rights to health and protection from violence. This is evidenced by the fact that we still do not have a final document. This lack of agreement is puzzling. In most cases, the subjects and the language have already been thoroughly debated and agreed — not once, but several times. They can be found in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and in the recommendations of last year's International Conference on Population and Development+5 review. In other cases there may be need for new language, but it is hard to understand why it should take so long.

I would like to give some examples, beginning with the question of unsafe abortion. Countries have agreed, on the basis of strong and irrefutable medical evidence, that unsafe abortion is a major public health problem. They have quite rightly agreed to act to minimize it and deal with its effects. Paragraph 8 (25) of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development is quite explicit, and the consensus was further clarified last year at the Conference's+5 review. Yet, paragraph 107 (i) of the document produced at 4 a.m. today, on the subject of unsafe abortion, is still in brackets. Surely no delegation and no one among us wants unsafe abortion and all the death, disease and suffering that it entails. If we do not, what is the disagreement about?

Again, paragraph 115 (a) refers to a holistic approach to women's health. It is still in brackets. Does

that mean that some of those present want a piecemeal approach to health? In paragraph 115 (d), what is the objection to health services for women? Is it only men who should have health services, when we know that a woman's reproductive health affects her whole life? Who will deny her the services she needs?

With regard to paragraph 115 (h) of this morning's document, should women not have access to female-controlled contraceptive methods — to female condoms — when we know that women are contracting HIV infections from their spouses? Do some people think that women should die from AIDS because they are getting it from their spouses? Who is against developing microbicides to allow women to protect themselves? Are any delegations opposed to finding better means to diagnose sexually transmitted diseases? If not, why is paragraph 115 (h) in brackets?

With regard to paragraph 119 (a), do not all delegations agree that maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family have a social significance and contribute to society? If so, who is against programmes to promote these roles? What is the paragraph in brackets about?

Finally, I am quite bewildered by the brackets around paragraphs 130 (a) and 130 (c). Who exactly is opposed to measures against violence against women and girls? Who wishes to let infanticide, abduction, trafficking, dowry deaths, honour killings and acid attacks go unpunished? Who supports female genital mutilation? Surely not all of us. Is there anyone who is in favour of rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and forced sterilization? Does anyone support their use as weapons of war? I hope not. If not, why should there still be brackets around these paragraphs on the last day of these negotiations?

Excuse me, Madam Vice-President, if I am naive. But I am frankly baffled by the inability to reach agreement on this language among countries that I know support all these measures and proposals — countries where I know actions are taking place to implement all the measures in our Programmes of Action.

Lest any doubt remains, these negotiations are based firmly on the sovereignty of nations and on countries' acceptance of human rights principles. Nothing in the document can in any way infringe on a country's right to make its own laws within the international framework. But let Member States remember that they have agreed to these international conventions and have subscribed to the agreements that we so painstakingly negotiated at the International Conference on Population and Development, at its five-year review Conference, and at the Beijing Conference. These recommendations are firmly rooted in universally accepted values and ethical principles. They are being successfully put into action in countries, and among peoples, of all religious beliefs. A common regard for morality unites us all. Let others not use ideology to divide us.

This review offers an opportunity to assess, calmly and in a spirit of cooperation, recommendations that are both eminently practical and completely ethical. They reinforce the rights of individuals, both men and women. And they encourage the development of nations with justice and equity. I hope that the Assembly will approach the remainder of the questions to be decided in a spirit of constructive collaboration and mutual regard.

We have come a long way. Let us leave the Hall united and determined to work together for all people of the world, and especially for the majority of the world's people, who happen to be women. Let us move forward and keep moving forward, and let us resist any actions that take us back.

I wish the Assembly all success in the rest of the night.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Ms. Bellamy (United Nations Children's Fund): On behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), I am very pleased to address this special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise progress towards the goals that were set at the Fourth World Conference on Women. From the founding conference in San Francisco 55 years ago, through Mexico City, Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing, and on to this historic week, the United Nations and its partners have worked tirelessly to elevate the cause of women's rights and girls' rights to the highest reaches of the international agenda.

The Beijing gathering was a watershed event in that struggle. Like the Beijing Conference, this special session has shown itself to be greater than the sum of its parts. The very fact that 10,000 delegates from

every region of the world, including young people, have gathered in this place to meet, to debate, to exchange ideas and information, to affirm old alliances and to set new ones: that in itself is as eloquent and empowering a statement as any that could be drafted.

That being said, one passionately hopes that through this gathering we will not reverse the hard-won gains of the past. Indeed, I can tell from the applause a moment ago that all participants listened very carefully to my colleague Nafis Sadik, who preceded me, and for whom I have the most extraordinary respect. She raised very relevant questions about why this process has been so excruciatingly unfortunate in its outcome to this point.

Yet I might say that for all the inspirational power of events such as those we have seen this week, these meetings are not in themselves what we need most to sustain the struggle. They cannot close the gap between the legal recognition of the rights of women and girls and the real-life discrimination and marginalization and outright violence that these girls and women still endure, day in and day out, in every corner of the world.

The realization of women's rights will come only through action: action to implement programmes that will improve the daily lives of women and consolidate their equal status. It is a process that must begin with steps that will ensure the survival, the protection and the full development of the girl child.

We all know that following the Beijing Conference there has been action; there have been successes. We have moved some steps closer to the world we would all like. But we are still far from fulfilling the promises that were made at Beijing. Women and children are a majority of the 1.2 billion people who are living in absolute poverty, and they suffer disproportionately from the adverse effects of globalization. Nearly 600,000 women and girls of child-bearing age still die each year during pregnancy and in labour. Countless numbers of women and children endure violence, abuse and exploitation in their daily lives as a result of armed conflict or discrimination in their own families, a fact that is underscored by new findings that at least one woman or girl in three is beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime. Women and girls are the most affected by the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, which infects 8,500 children and young people and kills 2,500 women each and every day. Some 600 million women cannot read or write, and the majority of the more than 110 million children not in school are girls.

In the course of this week's process of review and appraisal, UNICEF has expressed its deep concern that political will and resources and actions have yet to match the commitments that were made in Beijing. But we are heartened by the wealth of new ideas and specific actions that have been discussed for accelerating change, action that we hope will come as we in UNICEF and others accelerate implementation of the parallel commitments that were made at the 1990 World Summit for Children and other development conferences of the past decade.

Throughout this process we have witnessed once again the power of partnerships and the propellant energy and enthusiasm of non-governmental and women's groups. Indeed, those groups and their power have only grown with the influx of youth groups from all parts of the world. Their participation has inspired open and frank intergenerational dialogue on everything from education, violence and social and political participation to macroeconomic policies, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace-building.

UNICEF remains convinced that the goals of development, equality and peace are within reach, that we can create a world where the rights of women and girls are not violated or exploited, and where they are free to develop to their full potential and to play active leadership roles in their community.

If women are to enter and participate in government bodies, political parties, labour unions and community organizations and the like, then we must free girls to expand their capacities and horizons, to voice their opinions, to achieve their dreams. But for this to happen, we must act now, using the tools and the knowledge that already exist for reducing poverty and eliminating the entrenched discrimination that marginalizes women and children.

Fulfilling the right of every girl to education is the key to promoting true equality between boys and girls and men and women. That is why the United Nations initiative on girls' education that was launched by the Secretary-General at the World Education Forum in Dakar just last month is so important, and why, with our partners, UNICEF continues to promote quality basic education for all, with girls' education as our top priority. Girls' education is a proven best

investment. It is a best investment for human, social and economic development. But most important, it is every girl's right.

We must break the intergenerational cycle of discrimination and disadvantage. And we must begin by creating environments where girls and boys are respected and cared for equally in early childhood. We must ensure that they are breast-fed; that they have access to unpolluted air, safe drinking water and uncontaminated food; that they live where there are adequate sanitation facilities; and, above all, that they have time and space to play, to interact with others, to learn and to be loved. We must ensure also that there is good care not only for young children but also for their mothers, who often have no voice, limited access to resources, no legal protection and no respect. And we must involve fathers in the care of young children.

If girls are to realize their rights to education and prepare for adulthood, they must not be deprived of schooling for reasons of domestic labour and poverty. At the same time, schools must be transformed into safe places where girls can learn, participate, feel respected and develop confidence and self-esteem.

That means eliminating all forms of gender bias and discrimination in education systems and in the learning process. It means that schools must have adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities, health and nutrition services and policies that guarantee physical and mental health, safety and security. It also means that schools must be equipped to deliver quality education. We must find ways for them to be used more creatively to reduce, rather than to increase, disparities in access to quality learning. That includes making sure that girls have opportunities to benefit from the benefits of both new and old technologies, such as Internet connectivity and radio instruction. Finally, we must aim for socialization of girls and boys in a culture of non-violence and respect for others' rights, inherent dignity and equality. Equality in relationships with men and boys is essential if women and girls are to protect themselves, whether against violence, HIV/AIDS or anything else.

To achieve these ends, new collaborative relationships are needed within communities, among youth groups, religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, schoolteachers, health professionals, men's groups and women's groups and between communities and policy and decision makers at all levels.

We have entered a new era in fulfilling the human rights of women and girls. Throughout this week fresh ideas have emerged for making equality, development and peace a reality. Innovative actions and strategies have been recommended for overcoming obstacles and addressing the emerging issues. And new partnerships have been forged for creating and enabling environments to fulfil the equal rights of women and girls.

We have a framework for global action in the Platform for Action. We have instruments, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and we know what we have to do.

Let us leave here and begin the real work.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

Mr. Brown (United Nations Development Programme): The most striking single social, political and economic transformation of the past century has been the emergence of women as leaders in nearly every country and in every walk of life, from the thousands of women in India who entered local government, thanks to the *panchayat* legislation, to brave and accomplished leaders of social movements like Bella Abzug.

As the report on the world's women prepared by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) clearly showed this week, while progress has been encouraging on so many fronts, particularly since Beijing, there is still a long, long way to go. Whether we are talking about women's presence in parliaments, in business, in education or simply the right to vote, own property and be protected from violence and discrimination, much, much more still needs to be done to achieve gender equality. That is why, if the Beijing Conference was about commitments, Beijing+5 must be about how we are all going to meet those commitments. It must be about demanding accountability from Governments, businesses and civil society on achieving goals and targets they have set. It must be about moving gender issues from the margins to the mainstream, from the

grass-roots reality to policy makers in everything, everywhere, from international organizations to national budgets to local governance.

But above all Beijing+5 must not be about turning back. A famous lady Prime Minister in my own country once said, in warning voters and her opponents that there would be no U-turns, "This lady is not for turning". I hope the same can be said of all the delegates here, women and men alike.

As an organization, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is committed to helping answer those tough questions by using our universal presence and strong record as trusted partner in many countries, to help build capacity and strong institutions that help drive human development with gender sensitivity. That means we are striving to move beyond treating gender issues simply as a separate set of concerns; we are trying to mainstream gender throughout our policies and internal working practices and across our country offices.

There are three broad areas where we are doing so: by playing a strong and powerful advocacy role in raising awareness of issues and policy; helping mainstream sound and sensible policies relating to women; and making smart use of strategic partnerships to help implement them. To do the first, advocacy, we need suitable tools than can be used to monitor and advocate the policies and processes that enable women to take full control of their lives and the decisions that affect them. We need the tools to measure progress and accountability. That is why in 1995 UNDP devoted its annual *Human Development Report* to the issues of the Beijing Conference. In it, we introduced a set of key indicators, specific to gender and development and gender and empowerment, that have become widely recognized. Five years later these have now become the benchmark by which the human impact of development initiatives is measured. By using them and their correlates in national human development reports, we can and must play an important campaigning role with our partners in civil society, Governments and the media.

UNDP views itself as a campaigning organization, committed to stoking the demand for change, but we are also a policy advisory agency, helping Governments craft the policies and institutions that drive gender equality and women's empowerment. That means smart, active policy to address property rights, credit, communications and learning needs that women must have addressed if they are to seize their full potential and economic opportunities. I am particularly interested in helping Governments forge the right response to the information technology revolution, so that through public/private partnerships we can harness its transformative power to the credit market access and learning needs of poor women.

The new UNDP is about advocacy, policy advice and, thirdly, partnerships, inside and outside the United Nations family. Inside, our younger sister, UNIFEM, under the dynamic leadership of Noeleen Heyzer and her team, have led the way in demonstrating approaches that link micro-level actions with macro-level policies in specific areas. Then we at UNDP can use our own macro-strengths and country offices to mainstream those experiences and bring them to the attention of Governments. For example, when UNIFEM initiated a global campaign on violence against women, UNDP offices across Latin America were able to contribute directly to transformation of legislation across the region. In that way, we were able to leverage UNDP's strengths in advocacy, policy formation and partnerships with positive results.

UNDP's field expertise has also grown into a network of gender focal points. Here our work with a wonderful team of United Nations Volunteers (UNV) gender specialists based in UNDP field offices has been another outstanding example of partnership that has attracted large donor support.

But, in the final analysis, success or failure for us and our United Nations sisters can only be judged by the world's women, by whether we have contributed to providing choices and opportunities for those who have never had them — education for girls who have been denied it; protection from abuse at home and in the workplace for wives and mothers who have long had to endure it silently; and access to real political and economic power for all women in every country. Our job will not be done until we achieve all the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

Ms. Heyzer (United Nations Development Fund for Women): Beijing was the unbracketing of women's lives and nowhere at any time must the brackets be put back on.

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address participants on this final day of the Beijing+5 review. I congratulate everyone — Governments, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations agencies and the Secretariat — on the hard work that has gone into the preparations and proceedings. The stakes for women have been high and the differences of opinions and perspectives have been difficult to negotiate, but the fervour with which all have participated speaks to how central the issue of gender equality is to all other concerns.

The President returned to the Chair.

My main purpose is to talk about the ways in which we at the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) hope to work in partnership with participants to carry forward the agenda from this review process and to strengthen it. As the women's fund at the United Nations, we have a special role and, indeed, a special kind of relationship with Governments and non-governmental organizations alike.

The core of UNIFEM's work is not here in the General Assembly or in the United States. We are based very much on the ground in participants' countries where women and girls live. We made a choice at the beginning of this process to support the concentrated effort at national and regional levels for the preparation of the Beijing+5 review process. The agendas that have emerged from these consultations have led to concrete follow-up plans at regional and national levels. UNIFEM has already begun to map out the next steps to follow up the Beijing+5 review process in our strategy and business plan.

As the plan indicates, we will continue to build on the capacity of women's economic rights. We will engender governance and leadership and work to promote the human rights of women, particularly the eradication of violence against women. UNIFEM has a unique position from which to envision a world free of violence, poverty and exclusion. We are privileged to work with creative and innovative partners in Governments and non-governmental organizations in over a hundred countries. The promising strategies that we have supported in countries if scaled up through increased private financial support and political will will make a significant difference on the path to gender equality — for example, learning from the gender budgets initiative. In fact, this could lead to the engendering of budgets to ensure that the prioritization can occur so that the promises and commitments of the Beijing+5 process can be implemented.

Learning the ways in which women have access to markets and information technology is extremely important. We need to ensure that women reshape globalization from the perspective of poorer women. At the same time, if we learn from the strategies to build the political capacity of women, we will also make sure that there is greater participation of women in all countries throughout the world.

The partnerships that have developed between Governments and non-governmental organizations to understand the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is extremely important, and we have worked extremely hard to ensure that that happens. At the same time, learning from the countless efforts to combat the multiple forms of violence against women is something to which we will commit ourselves. The challenge that we face after the Beijing+5 process is to build on the good practices and advances that have been made in countries worldwide. These strategies need investments that will allow us to scale up and turn these innovations into standard practice.

In preparation for the Beijing+5 review, we have published a document on progress of the world's women to review what has been achieved for women's economic empowerment. Advances towards equality have not been even, and we still have a long way to go before the promises of Beijing can become a reality.

Progress has one message, one that we hope all Governments and non-governmental organizations will take with them. It is that we need greater accountability and the kind of political will, resources and targets to know how far we have come in our journey and how far we have to go.

We are proud of the progress made at this review session in the area of the elimination of violence against women. As a follow-up to Beijing, the General Assembly established a trust fund to help us eliminate violence against women, and UNIFEM has allocated $5 million to 80 programmes around the world. We hope, through campaigns and this kind of trust fund, to help in the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women, especially in the area of violence.

UNIFEM hopes to be a source of support and knowledge for the strategies developed to follow up on this session. We want to assist countries and communities to reach the goals and targets that have been agreed to. We published the document on the progress of the world's women to highlight three elements that are critical to any follow-up strategies: accountability, commitment and transformation. That is "ACT" in short, which we hope will be the theme when all return to their countries. We need to ensure accountability for agreements in the Platform for Action and the regional plans of action that emerged in Beijing, but clearly in terms of the Convention and the Optional Protocol. We need to demonstrate commitments to the resources made available, and we need to promote the kind of transformation to ensure the perspectives, interests and contribution of women and girls to shape our world in accordance with international human rights treaties and standards.

Let us in the next five to ten years have a strong focus on accountability in terms of the commitments we make and in terms of transformation. Let us act. Only then can we bring about a world free of violence and poverty, a world ordered in such a way that all basic needs become basic rights. That is a world I pray the twenty-first century will see.

The President: In accordance with the decision taken at the meeting this morning, I shall now call on the representatives of the five selected non-governmental organizations. I again remind those speakers that their statements should not exceed five minutes.

I call on Ms. Gladys Mutukwa, Chairperson of Women in Law and Development in Africa.

Ms. Mutukwa: It gives me great pleasure to quickly present the perspectives and expectations of the African women non-governmental organizations to the special session on Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.

These expectations and perspectives emanate from the meetings of the African non-governmental organization caucus that have been taking place here throughout the period. The caucus notes that in the last five years since Beijing there has been some progress in Africa in the implementation of the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action in certain areas. But there has also been a lot of deterioration in the situation of women in a number of fields. The African women non-governmental organizations wish to state that great concern over this deterioration in the situation of women in Africa inspires and influences all our work on the ground, in the various villages, towns, communities and cities of Africa. It also inspires our participation in this and other conferences.

We also wish to draw the attention of the Assembly to the fact that the eyes of millions of women in Africa are focused here. They want to see all Governments stand strongly behind the commitment they made to them in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The African women's non-governmental organizations had the following expectations from this session. We expected an honest, candid and bold assessment of the constraints to the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We also expected a recommitment to that Platform with no renegotiation of the agreements contained therein. And finally, we expected an outcome document that had specific, concrete and sustainable actions with measurable benchmarks and adequate resources for a speedier translation of the Beijing commitments into reality.

We the African non-governmental organizations gathered here state categorically that there should be no going back on Beijing. At the dawn of the new millennium, we should be looking towards even stronger commitments and even better implementation rather than either going back or perpetuating the status quo of five years ago.

Our participation and expectations are influenced by the following factors in Africa: the great concern that we have that in spite of the efforts made by civil societies, Governments and other actors, the situation of women has continued to deteriorate in all sectors. We are disappointed at the lack of political will shown by some States with respect to some of the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action. We also are inspired to go on by the shocking and rising manifestations of all forms of violence against women in the private and public sector.

We are also shaken by the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is completely eroding even the minimal gains women and girls have made in the past decade and is destroying the social fabric of the African continent.

Our work also is based on great concern that the goals of equality, development and peace of the last 25 years are still largely unfulfilled, even at the dawn of a new millennium. We are also greatly concerned at the fact that an entire generation of African youth are growing up with decreasing opportunities in all spheres of life and that girl children and young women are particularly vulnerable due to a lack of educational opportunities, sexual exploitation and a lack of protection from discriminatory laws, practices and beliefs.

The African non-governmental organizations call on all Governments and development partners to reinforce their commitments to, and collaborate with, local, national, regional and international women's non-governmental organizations in order to promote a transformative development agenda for Africa.

At the African Regional Preparatory Conference, we set five regional priorities, to which we would draw the attention of Member States. We hope that even at this last minute people will take into account the crucial realities of Africa.

These priorities are in the field of women and decision-making, where we say that increased participation by women in decision-making positions at all levels should be given serious and urgent attention. The other critical area is the issue of women's human rights. We see that in spite of the ratification of several international and regional instruments for the promotion of women's rights, in most of Africa women are generally still regarded as second-class citizens, minors and the property of their husbands. There is no excuse, as far as we are concerned, for failing to recognize that women's human rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. It is also not acceptable to us that culture or religion should be used as an excuse to violate women's human rights.

While we acknowledge that there have been some benefits from the process of globalization, there have also been many negative consequences for Africa, especially in economic terms and in terms of its impact on the social well-being of the people. The adoption and implementation of macroeconomic policies and programmes that are gender-blind have continued the marginalization of women and the feminization of poverty.

I would return to the issue of HIV/AIDS, which is a pandemic and a major disaster for Africa. It has exacerbated the already vulnerable situation of women's health and their status and ability to access socio-economic rights. The nexus between discriminatory laws, culture, religion and gender disempowerment has led to a situation whereby the pandemic is gradually wiping out an entire generation of Africans. Governments should prioritize and institute comprehensive, proactive and multisectoral responses to the AIDS pandemic.

Conflict is the other priority. Inter-State and intra-State conflicts in Africa have increased over the last five years, leaving over 2 million African dead and many more as refugees and displaced persons. Many of these are women and children. All Governments should adopt holistic approaches to the issues of peace-building, rehabilitation, reconstruction and the promotion of a culture of peace.

Cutting across all of these issues is the issue of the girl child. The girl child of Africa today is the woman of tomorrow, and what happens to that girl child determines what type of woman she is going to be. If she is uneducated now, she will end up an illiterate African woman — that is, if she survives all of these other problems.

The African women's non-governmental organizations are very concerned about the slow pace of the negotiations and the fact that some Governments want to go back on the commitments made years ago. We are still optimistic that belief in the rights of women will come to the fore. We are also disappointed that unfinished issues from other meetings and other forums are being used today to delay progress on women's rights. We will, however, continue to work hard in the various countries to make sure that we finish up the business of using the Beijing Platform for Action and the regional Platform for Action to improve the lives of women, children and men in the African continent. We will do this in partnership with Governments and with all other actors, as we believe that the rights of women and the issues of gender equality are the business of us all — men, women and children.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Pam Rajput, Vice-President of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti.

Ms. Rajput (Mahila Dakshata Samiti): I am speaking before the Assembly on behalf of Asia Pacific

Women's Watch and of the region — indeed, on behalf of 60 per cent of the women of the world. Our voices are the voices of the women of the world at large. During both the session of the Preparatory Committee and the current week, we heard, throughout the corridors of the United Nations, our sisters raise the same concerns.

I may, however, hasten to add that I am not consciously using the words "grass roots voices", as I fear that, due to unsustainable development policies, the grass is disappearing, not to mention the roots. We now hear about displaced women, refugee women, squatter women, migrant women, trafficked women and commodified women — where are their roots?

While acknowledging some gains from the Beijing Platform, particularly a growing acceptance of and commitment to addressing women's needs, the past few years have been particularly difficult for our region. Challenges posed by new trends perpetuate injustice, threaten world peace and impede women's empowerment. These include the negative impact of globalization; the Asian financial crisis; the intensification of armed and other forms of violence conflict; the escalation of the use of religious, ethnic, cultural and other forms of identity-based constructs to deny women equal rights and resources; and the lack of political will to empower women beyond policy statements and legislation.

The region has seen an increase in the number of women living in poverty and this has been largely caused by the impact of international influences, including globalization and the policies followed by the Bretton Woods institutions and such bodies as the World Trade Organization (WTO). There is reduced access to affordable, quality health care, including primary health care, and increased struggle for the means of livelihood. Food security stands endangered and drinking water is becoming scarce. I made a statement before the meeting of the Preparatory Committee in March and I am going to repeat it here again because I find the audience different. I said: "What does Miss Universe need? Pepsi. What does Miss World need? Coca Cola. But what does the poor woman need? Safe drinking water."

It is equally important to take note of the increasing culture of violence, trafficking, forced prostitution and honour killings and the escalating commodification of women and girl-children and violation of their human rights. The participation of women in politics and decision-making bodies, which is crucial to the empowerment of women, continues to be very low.

A revolution in communications is taking place across the world. Women's access to all means of communication and public expression is essential to their equal and democratic participation in the development of communities and societies.

While noting the strengthening and enhancement of national machineries, we lament the low level of political will, the relative absence of genuine monitoring and evaluation of other institutional mechanisms, as well as resource commitment at both the national and international levels.

We have begun the new millennium with the two momentous events of Beijing+5 and the Social Summit+5. As we from the women's movement commit ourselves to translating our vision into reality, we strive to create societies based on individual and social dignity in which women feel strong, active, creative and empowered; where the vital power of our bodies' functioning and healing remains intact; where our diverse abilities and talents are valued; and where we make decisions and choices, express ourselves and move freely and confidently without fear of violence.

We look to further initiatives from this special session and a commitment to not going back on the Beijing Platform for Action. We call upon the Governments of the world, the United Nations, international agencies, non-State actors and civil society to have the courage and commitment to translate the high hopes of the Beijing Platform for Action into concrete actions that help us to move from conflict inequality and injustice towards the principles of mutual respect, equality and justice.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we have a song from the women's movement that we sang in Nairobi and Beijing. "We shall overcome — we shall overcome — we shall overcome some day." How long shall we sing "we shall overcome?" May we hope that, when we assemble again in 2005, the lyrics will have changed to "We have overcome — we have overcome — we have overcome."

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Françoise David, representative of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

Ms. David (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women) (*spoke in French*): I have come here to speak on behalf of the women of North America and Eastern and Western Europe, on behalf of the diverse women who live in our region: young and old women; women of all religions, ethnic origins and social strata; white women, women of colour and native women; heterosexual and lesbian women; migrant women and disabled women.

We are proud of our diversity but we are aware that it is also a source of discrimination and inequality among women. Therefore, together, we have decided to work for change. At the end of these days of difficult and often very frustrating negotiations, we demand that our Governments and that all Governments of the world commit themselves wholeheartedly to adopting concrete measures to ensure the equality of all women. We demand parity, institutional mechanisms to guarantee women's right to equality, and financial resources in the budgets of Governments, the specialized United Nations agencies and regional bodies to defend women's human rights and support women in need. We condemn the increasing poverty of women throughout our region, especially in Eastern Europe, where transitional economies and liberalization have unleashed a brutal decline in living conditions.

We therefore demand jobs for all women; a social security net; salaries that offer a decent living; state support for women's entrepreneurship; protection of labour laws; easier access to unionization; and recognition of women's unpaid work.

In the context of globalization, in which life itself is an object and commodity, women's poverty enriches unscrupulous multinational corporations. For instance, thousands of Eastern European women are lured into illicit networks with promises of false jobs in the West. They are exploited, humiliated and detained without any real hope of succour. We therefore demand that States adopt measures to put an end to the traffic in women and girls.

The clash of arms has had a heavy toll in our region, again in the East. Thousands of women and their children have been abruptly thrown into the street. They have lived weeks on end in terror of being raped, beaten and killed. We, the women of Europe and North America, say "no more war, no more bombs". We say "no" to the arms merchants who grow rich so that others may starve and die in wars.

We also remind our States that women enjoy the inalienable right to make choices about their lives, bodies and sexual and reproductive health. We demand that laws recognize this right. We demand concrete measures and joint action from Governments and non-governmental organizations to put an end to all forms of violence against women. We must say "no" once and for all to those who beat, harass, rape and kill women simply because they are women and who arrogate to themselves the right to make decisions for women and to possess them as if they were mere objects.

Now that the United Nations special session on women is coming to a close, and now that we have been able to see how difficult it is to make progress in the struggle of women for equality and freedom, we wish to state that our struggle will not end, because we now need more than just wishful thinking and speechifying. We demand concrete action, measurement indicators and deadlines. We demand another gathering — a fifth World Conference on Women — in 2005, where we will demand explanations from all the world's decision makers. We are determined to fight tirelessly until the rights of all women everywhere in the world are recognized.

At the invitation of the Women's Federation of Quebec, of which I am the President, millions of women will march next fall in cities and villages throughout 155 countries to demand an end to poverty and violence against women. The World March for Women 2000 will culminate here at the United Nations on 17 October, where we will meet anew to work together towards a world based on equality between the sexes, social justice and the redistribution of wealth.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Virginia Vargas, President of the Centro de la Mujer Peruana "Flora Tristan".

Ms. Vargas (Centro de la Mujer Peruana "Flora Tristan") (*spoke in Spanish*): First, as part of civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean, we warmly congratulate the delegations of our region, which, for the most part, have undertaken at this session to advance the commitments of the Platform for Action.

I do not know whether I should say "Good evening". Can one say "Good evening" on an evening

such as this? Are those days good in which a single word can make us lose sight of the fact that beyond it are the lives of millions of women? What word can be worth more than the concepts that the word itself represents? What word has greater value than the women who are trafficked in, or greater than that which at this very moment hours of child labour are producing? What word is worth more than the fear of women living in areas of conflict, especially when those areas of conflict are the very bodies of those women? Is there a single word worth more than migrant women working without rights and without fixed hours? Can one hide discrimination and exclusion with a single word? What colours do words have? In what language and culture did the best and worst words originate? With what language and with which culture do we seek to place a value on the diversity of faces, races, ethnic groups, histories and struggles of our women? Can evenings, afternoons and mornings be called good on days when Governments turn a deaf ear to the commitments we women assumed, and which many of those represented here have not respected?

How can we express in so short a time the confidence with which we went to Beijing? How can we speak about everything we have done in the past five years to fulfil our part of the Platform for Action? How can we express to those represented here that they have placed our hopes in brackets because of a language problem? After this sorry lack of action, how can we believe in those Governments whose ruling elites are more concerned with their own petty religious, political and economic interests? How can we go back to our countries and tell our peoples that 10 is more than 187? Must we once again convince the Assembly that our struggle is just?

How many more words are necessary for youth not to be stigmatized? How many words must be learned for a female astronaut not to astonish anybody? How much citizenship and democracy must be learned for the positive discrimination and institutional mechanisms that we called for to become things of the past? How many more words are necessary for pregnancy not to mean the risk of death, with abortion the primary cause? How many words are necessary for love not to be condemned when it does not conform to the words that some of those represented here wish to use to define it? What kind of logic is it that accepts mutual hatred and war between and within our countries and wishes to make war on the love that does not fit its definitions?

What religion do words have? What words define that God through whom attempts are made to legitimize contempt, violence and injustice against women? I say to those whom the cap fits: "With what words do you believe can muzzle the creativity, ideas and dreams of millions of women? Can we really seek to change history in this new millennium? The time of prohibition and brackets belongs to some of you here but — in spite some of you — the time of history is ours. You have the opportunity to advance with us women. What words at this session will you place the most value on? Five years ago in the General Assembly it appeared that everything had been said. Now the words no longer understand what is happening. The words of the women of Latin America and the Caribbean are 'Rights, justice and democracy'. May your words not take history backward."

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Hoda Badran, Chairperson of the Alliance for Arab Women.

Ms. Badran (Alliance for Arab Women): I have the privilege to speak on behalf of the Arab region, with thousands of non-governmental organizations working for women's rights. We all share the same language, and are united by the same destiny.

At this important meeting, I would like to highlight the following points.

First, we honour everything that has been achieved through the Beijing Conference, the International Conference on Population and Development and all human rights instruments. We will therefore take these achievements forward, not backwards.

Secondly, significant steps have been taken since Beijing by almost all countries of the Arab region. Gains in critical areas of concern have been achieved. Efforts are still needed, however, in the following areas: ensuring the freedom of non-governmental organizations and providing the necessary support for their work; reviewing and changing existing legislation, including family laws, existing textbooks and media messages to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women; ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its optional protocol, and the Statute of the International Criminal

Court, because there is no contradiction between them and Arab constitutions or between them and the right interpretation of Islam, which is the dominant religion in the region. Moreover, we call for more democracy — socially, economically and politically — to allow all women to participate effectively in all public decisions; we need protection for women activists and intellectuals against violence and reactionary campaigns, and against intimidation aimed against free thinking.

Further, problems in the areas of the economy, education and social insurance need to be addressed more vigorously. The needs of rural women, disadvantaged groups and others with special handicaps should get more attention. Other issues to be addressed include "honour killing", reproductive health and immigrant women. Resources to address women's needs have to be increased both nationally and internationally.

The region has witnessed immense problems, causing suffering among its women and affecting the efforts of Governments to implement the Platform for Action. Palestinian women have suffered, and are still suffering, from displacement and, along with Syrian women, are in distress as a result of the Israeli occupation. Lebanese women too have suffered from the continued invasion of the South. Iraqi, Sudanese and Libyan women are suffering as a result of economic sanctions and embargoes. We demand the honouring of United Nations resolutions and just peace; we demand the lifting of sanctions and the freeing of prisoners from all prisons.

At this time of change, there is nothing that cannot be changed to enable women to exercise their rights more fully and to carry out their responsibilities more effectively. Such changes can happen through conscientious, purposeful social action, through the provision of information and with the support of legitimacy. If all of us — non-governmental organizations, Governments and the business sector — assume our responsibilities; if the media become the messenger rather than the message; if we restore belief in democracy: then we, men and women, may be able to live and let live, and to love and be loved.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda items 8 and 9.

In view of the fact that the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole has not completed its work, I shall now suspend this meeting, which will resume immediately following the conclusion of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 p.m.